

FUSING INTUITED ATMOSPHERE AND EMPATHY INTO  
THE ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN PROCESS

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HENRIK ILVESMÄKI







AALTO UNIVERSITY  
School of Arts, Design, and Architecture

Fusing Intuited Atmosphere and Empathy into the  
Architectural Design Process

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Henrik Ilvesmäki



Aalto University,  
School of Arts, Design, and Architecture  
Department of Architecture, Building Design  
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**Author:** Henrik Ilvesmäki  
**Title:** Fusing Intuited Atmosphere and Empathy  
into the Architectural Design Process  
**Supervisor:** Pirjo Sanaksenaho, D.Sc.  
Associate Professor  
(Architecture, Building Design)  
**Advisors:** Juhani Pallasmaa, Professor Emeritus  
Esa Laaksonen, Architect  
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## Abstract

This thesis attempts to discern characteristics of the interplay of atmosphere and empathy within the imagination of an architect during the architectural design stage. This interaction, and the respective genealogies of the subjects (along with their definitions), are discussed from a phenomenological viewpoint, emphasizing embodied consciousness as the basis of human perception.

The research featured herein is an interview study, conducted primarily via Internet phone calls, and questioning 9 accomplished architects from the Nordic countries (Juhani Pallasmaa, Juha Leiviskä, and Johan Celsing), Switzerland (Adam Caruso and Emanuel Christ), and the United States of America (Billie Tsien and Tod Williams, Rick Joy, and Steven Holl). The conclusions of the study are based on findings from these interviews, with research data interpreted through a cyclical, hermeneutic process, which focuses not only on the words of the interviewees but their implied feelings, and thus, meanings.

The interviewees connect the creation of atmosphere to a wide variety of aspects within the architectural design process that all constitute what they consider to be “a good design process.” Most believe in the importance of the phenomenon of atmosphere as a subconscious influencer but think that it cannot be approached directly, lest it be damaged. Some architects, however, have a more analytical and confrontational methodology for working with atmosphere, which stands in opposition to the above. The interviewees relate empathy to a perceptual sensitivity toward the

various other influencers in the design process (e.g. clients, the site, states and municipalities, etc.), seeing empathy as essential to a good design process. This notion is, however, challenged by an architect’s need to internalize these influencers, tying their demands to the designer’s personal aspirations and subconscious capacity to project themselves into their designs. The original term for empathy — the German “Einfühlung” — is therefore expanded in its contemporary meaning here to include the ability to project oneself into a given environment, whether imagined or physically extant. Thus, it is concluded that this term serves to effectively represent what happens in the architectural design.

The combination of the study findings and background research suggest an interplay between atmosphere and empathy during not just the intuited design process but also upon the completion of a building. The two subjects (atmosphere and empathy) can thus be seen to operate in a similar capacity as “in-between” phenomena, or relations which connect people to other people as well as objects. Within the imagination of the architect, then, it is their empathic connection to their work (Einfühlung) that is the primary phenomenal process employed by the creator of their intuited world; whereas upon the completion of a building or project, it is atmosphere that becomes the primary phenomenon, subsuming all people and objects within its zone of influence.

**Keywords:** architecture, design, process, atmosphere, empathy, phenomenology, interview.



## Tiivistelmä

Tämä diplomityö pyrkii selvittämään tunnelman ja empatian vuorovaikutuksen ominaisuuksia arkkitehdin mielikuvituksessa rakennussuunnittelutyön aikana. Tätä vuorovaikutussuhdetta, ja käsitteiden historiaa sekä merkityksiä, käsitellään fenomenologisesta näkökulmasta, korostaen kehoallista tietoisuutta ihmisen havainnointikyvyn lähtökohtana.

Työssä esiintyvä tutkimustyö käsittää haastattelututkimuksen, joka toteutettiin pitkälti Internet-puheluin. Haastateltavat henkilöt olivat yhdeksän kokenutta arkkitehtiä kolmelta eri alueelta: Pohjoismaista (Juhani Pallasmaa, Juha Leiviskä ja Johan Celsing), Sveitsistä (Adam Caruso ja Emanuel Christ) ja Yhdysvalloista (Billie Tsien, Tod Williams, Rick Joy ja Steven Holl). Tutkimuksen päätelmät perustuivat haastatteluissa tehtyihin havaintoihin, joita tulkittiin jaksottaisen, hermeneuttisen prosessin kautta. Tämä menetelmä keskittyi haastateltavien puheen lisäksi myös tulkintoihin heidän keskustelujen aikaisista tunteistaan, pyrkien selvittämään heidän sanojensa todellisia merkityksiä.

Haastateltavat yhdistävät tunnelman luomisen lukuisiin muihin arkkitehtonisen suunnitteluprosessin tekijöihin, jotka yhdessä käsittävät heidän ymmärryksensä mukaisen “hyvän suunnitteluprosessin.” Monet heistä uskovat tunnelman ilmiön tärkeyteen alitajuisena vaikuttimena, mutta pitävät merkityksellisenä, ettei sitä lähestytä suoraan, jotta välttään sen vahingoittumiselta. Jotkut arkkitehteistä toimivat kuitenkin toisin, kohdaten tunnelman suoran ja analyttisen menettelytavan avulla. Haastateltavat yhdistävät empatian havainnointikyvyn herkkyyteen suunnitteluprosessissa, pitäen sitä edellytyksenä

“hyvälle suunnitteluprosessille” ja kyvylle tulkita eri tahojen (muun muassa asiakkaan, tontin tai kunnan) vaikutusta siihen. Tätä ajatusta haastaa kuitenkin arkkitehtien tarve sisäistää edellä mainitut vaikuttajat, jolloin näiden vaatimukset kietoutuvat suunnittelijoiden henkilökohtaisiin tavoitteisiin ja alitajuisen kykyyn projisoida itsensä omaan työhönsä. Empatian alkuperäinen saksankielinen termi “Einführung” otetaan tämän johdosta käyttöön empatian nykymerkityksen laajenuksena, jotta ilmiön käsitteleminen työssä saadaan sisältämään ihmisen kyvyn projisoida itsensä omaan ympäristöönsä — oli se sitten kuviteltu tai fyysisesti todellinen. Tämän seurauksena termin päätellään kuvaavan efektiivisesti arkkitehtonisen suunnitteluprosessin tiettyä tapahtumaa.

Tutkimuspäätelmien ja taustatutkimuksen yhdistäminen viittaa vuorovaikutukseen tunnelman ja empatian välillä intuitiivisen suunnitteluprosessin lisäksi myös silloin, kun rakennus on valmistunut. Tutkimuskohteiden (tunnelman ja empatian) voidaan katsoa vaikuttavan samankaltaisesti “väli-ilmiönä”, yhdistäen ihmisiä ihmisiin ja esineisiin. Täten, empaattinen suhde omaan työhön (Einführung) toimii arkkitehdin mielikuvituksessa hänen käyttämäänsä pääasiallisena fenomenalisena prosessina, mutta työn valmistuttua rakennukseksi, tunnelma ottaa tämän ensisijaisen roolin, ja sisällyttää vaikutuspiiriinsä kaikki sen alaisuudessa olevat ihmiset ja esineet.

**Avainsanat:** arkkitehtuuri, suunnittelu, prosessi, tunnelma, empatia, fenomenologia, haastattelu.



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## 1. Introduction

This study aims to clarify the relationship between atmosphere, empathy, and the architectural design process of a group of renowned architects, and in doing so, say something universal and principled about such themes. I aim to do this by presenting a phenomenological analysis of a collection of interview data; that is, through interviewing said architects, I attempt to experience a glimpse of their respective design perspectives. I do this not merely by reflecting upon their words alone but also their behavior in the interview. The analysis could thus be described as “subjective” in the sense of being a qualitative analysis performed on the basis of the limited set of conceptual knowledge I possess. Perhaps most fundamentally, the analysis is based on my belief that the complex feelings and viewpoints within architectural design work can be made clearer by an empathic connection with the designers themselves. Thus, the philosophical methodology known as “phenomenology” has been chosen as the primary methodological viewpoint due to the complex and ephemeral (or perhaps “non-quantitative”) nature of the subject matter, since a strictly quantitative method of analysis would not have been able to elucidate the essentially qualitative notions of “atmosphere” and “empathy” due to both complications of defining and measuring these phenomena.

The state of architectural practice in Finland is the societal impetus for this study: the field is primarily viewed as a combination of the technical and practical aspects of building. Consequently, any deeper contemplation about the wide range of possible design goals is often overlooked. Architects may fail to reflect on their own methods, where those methods come from, and what the consequences of such methods are on the many different aspects of architecture — for example, atmosphere. Discussing the

matter rarely develops statements beyond personal opinions, and even professionals among themselves seldom delve deeper into matters outside of practical design concerns. Thus, with this thesis, I suggest that it is critical for designers to question the reasons why they make any particular decision, and that they analyze their intentions, aspirations, and thought processes in their work.

### 1.1 Focus of the Study

The Cambridge dictionary defines atmosphere as “the character, feeling or mood of a place or situation.”<sup>1</sup> Atmosphere is something that is felt but rarely explicitly thematized in discussion — it is something that is almost characteristically implicitly understood. Nevertheless, it is the most well-established of the study’s subjects in terms of written material. The existing differing perspectives establish atmosphere as either something that is part of a specific place, or, as a phenomenon solely tied to the beholder of the experience. Atmosphere can also be regarded as an interplay of these two components: a place can have a characteristic atmosphere which can in turn create a shift in the mood of the beholder. It is therefore possible to ascertain that differences in the interpretation of atmosphere as a phenomenon can be attributed to the different aspects which comprise it: these being mood, feeling, and character, and the discussions about their respective definitions and interrelations. Given the inchoate nature of the phenomenon, in this study I discuss atmosphere directly with the interviewees and ask them for their definition of it. Its definition thus shifts based on the interviewee in question and has the capacity to differentiate the respective speakers’ perspectives.

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<sup>1</sup> Cambridge Online Dictionary. Cambridge University Press: July 9, 2018. <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/atmosphere>>.



Empathy, for its part, is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as “the ability to share someone else’s feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person’s situation.”<sup>2</sup> This is tellingly linked by the dictionary to the words sympathy and sensitivity, both phenomena that can be regarded as the foundation of empathy. Within the realm of architectural design, empathy is more often understood as something tied to questions of accessibility for persons of all abilities. However, it can also be conceived within the field in another way, namely: as the very basis of design itself. Juhani Pallasmaa highlights the importance of an empathic worldview as an essential tool for designers throughout his many texts — one of which is found in the book *Architecture and Empathy*. He maintains that architects must be able to imagine themselves as different actors within an architectural project — be it a city, a building, or a park (Pallasmaa 2015: 10-11).<sup>3</sup> It is this form of empathy which I address in this study, i.e.: empathy understood as an intuitive and projective capacity which the designer employs throughout the entirety of the design process. The phenomenon is not always discussed directly with the interviewees, but their relationship to it can be inferred from the answers they give to some of the interview questions I asked them.

While atmosphere and empathy are in themselves aspects of the study, their connection is what the research primarily aims to address. The focus is thus in defining how an architect intuitively imagines an atmosphere through their empathic capacities throughout the process of architectural design. Imagination, in this instance, brings together the different facets of this study: it

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2 Cambridge Online Dictionary. Cambridge University Press: July 9, 2018. <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/empathy>>.

3 Gallese, Vittorio; Mallgrave, Harry Francis; Pallasmaa, Juhani; Robinson, Sarah. *Architecture and Empathy*. Espoo: Tapio Wirkkala - Rut Bryk Foundation, 2015.

is informed by the memories of an architect and thus functions as the fabric connecting past, present, and in the case of architectural projects to be realized, the future, together (Pallasmaa 2011: 36, 41).<sup>4</sup> The intuitive ability of architects to “feel” atmosphere in the early stages of design work cannot be gauged in strength or other quantifiable aspects due to its qualitative complexity as well as the idiosyncrasies of the knowledge derived from an individual’s personal experiences. As such, another aim of this study is to analyze how mindful the interviewed architects are of this phenomenon in their own work. The empathic intuiting (or “feeling”) of atmosphere can naturally take many forms: a strong intuitive capacity can be present whether an architect has the ability to formalize (in the sense of explicitly articulating) their subconscious motivations clearly or not. Given this, it is a benefit of this study that the interviewed architects are from different countries and have differing relations to academia, writing, and architectural practice in general. They are all, however, masters of their craft, and have been previously associated with the concept of atmosphere through their architecture as well as their written and spoken output. It is for these reasons that their possessing strongly developed capacities for empathic design can be considered sufficiently well-established.

Finally, and in a more mundane sense, this study is simply a collection of discussions between myself and a selection of architects, taking the form of a compilation of the ideas that these conversations have aroused and inspired. I view the relationship of atmosphere and empathy within the architectural design process as something of a timeless subject, which connects the architects of today with those of times past. So while the precise phraseology employed throughout this discussion may shift in terms of

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4 Pallasmaa, Juhani. *Imagination and Imagery in Architecture*. London: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2011.



its meaning and character, I believe its content has nevertheless long been present in the field of design. It is, furthermore, my understanding that an important subtext throughout this study concerns a key part of architectural practice, namely: the complex and often mysterious relationship of the subconscious and conscious aspects of the artistic mind. Thus, the phenomenological perspective deployed throughout reveals both my personal — and, importantly, interpersonal — connection to the subject matter, the interviewed architects, as well as my current capacity for qualitative study. Therefore, I feel as though this study serves as a fitting end to an important period of personal and professional education in my life.

## 1.2 Research Questions

The framework of the study is defined by the interview questions, largely depending on the interviewees' answers. There are three main questions that the study attempts to answer. I will introduce and discuss them in this section.

**What role do the phenomena of empathy and atmosphere play in the architect's design processes, and how do they interact?**

The first study question aims to combine the answers of the interviewees into one conclusive interpretation of these phenomena and their interrelations as well as focussing on the namesake of the study — the fusion of atmosphere and empathy. Answering the question will rely on the interviewees making this connection on their own. It is paramount that this primary study question not be mentioned during the interviews in order to avoid bias. The fact that the interview questions are asked one after another

should serve as the associative hint to compel the interviewees to make the connection. The way the interviewees treat this connection is key, however, such treatment will most likely differ from one interviewee to the next, thus giving the study a more or less conclusive answer.

**What purpose do conscious and subconscious thought processes, as well as embodied feelings, have in each architect's design process? How explicitly is this connection recognized?**

This second study question relies on the interviewees' insights and focuses on making comparisons. Analyzing the conscious and the subconscious in the answers requires a high degree of interpretation, and cannot be evaluated by direct questions. Both the interview questions and their topics were formulated to encourage self-reflection. As such, reaching the second goal of this study is dependent upon the interviewees' spontaneous triggering of self-reflection during the interview.

## 1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis comprises five chapters, followed by a list of references. Theoretical and methodological development is conducted throughout the text.

The first introductory chapter introduces the reader to the research topic, including the background and focus of the thesis, providing an overview of the structure of the text along with the research questions.

In the second chapter, I review the relevant literature to my topic, namely: the previous research on atmosphere and empathy within the field of architecture. This chapter shows how the notion of atmosphere has existed in one form or another



for centuries, whereas the concept of empathy, by contrast, has been mainly discussed since the late 19th century. I also discuss the intersection of these two phenomena in architectural design, showing how little their connection has been discussed, as well as provide an overview of the meaning of phenomenology.

The third chapter provides the data collection as well as the methodology employed to conduct this study. The main method of data collection is a phenomenologically-inspired, open interview. I analyze the data gathered in this study using a phenomenologically reflective methodology. Given this, my position as the researcher is discussed in this chapter, together with the research process, and the general design of the study.

In the fourth chapter, I present the central findings of the research interviews through the answers given to the research questions which are the basis of this study. The findings are ascertained through a phenomenologically-informed subjective analysis which attempts to uncover what the subjects of the interview are attempting to communicate in their responses. The chapter also highlights the self-criticism that must be part of such a reflective process.

The final chapter (five) concludes the thesis with a discussion section and the conclusions of the study. In particular, I pay attention to the malleability of the phenomena of atmosphere and empathy in architectural design work as well as the inherent role of subjectivity (and intersubjectivity) in the intuited experience of architecture. I conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this research, addressing both research validity and reliability of this study, together with reflections on my research process more generally.

## **2. Previous Research on Atmosphere and Empathy in Architecture**

This chapter provides an overview about the meaning of the main terms of the paper: atmosphere and empathy. The first section details the genealogy of atmosphere in architecture, with its various synonyms and developments throughout history. A special focus on recent studies and the impact of phenomenology on atmosphere is present. The second section explains the genealogy of empathy, while also showcasing a more philosophical viewpoint regarding its nature, as the phenomenon is a contested topic in philosophy and social sciences. The third section depicts how atmosphere and empathy have been viewed in the architectural design process prior to this study, and the lack of research on the subject. The fourth and final section is a general overview about the meaning of phenomenology and its value as a philosophical viewpoint.

### **2.1 Atmosphere**

Atmosphere in architecture is one of a multitude of words meaning the same, elusive phenomenon: an emotive impression about a physical architectural space. These words include for example the overall feeling, mood, tonement, ambience and character of architecture. Despite often being used as synonyms of each other, they carry with them different meanings — some of which explain the variances between the way atmosphere has been viewed throughout history. This section focuses on the way the phenomenon has been perceived since before the 19th century, the key differences between the descriptions that have arisen since then, and its development to the form it is understood in this paper.



The meaning of atmosphere in everyday encounters — for example in certain weather or in human interactions — is an in-depth discussion requiring a chapter of its own. While this is not the topic addressed in this paper, it serves to preface the discussion about atmosphere in architecture to describe the historical, climatic origins of the term. Tonino Griffero writes about the subject in his book *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces*:

“By saying ‘what suffocating weather!’ (on a very hot summer day) or ‘what oppressive weather!’ (on a foggy autumn day), we are expressing the fact that the sticky drowsiness and the vaguely bad mood we got in can be referred not so much to objects or specific events but rather to a certain atmosphere. Namely, to a sort of nomad feeling that is, so to speak, in the air; one of those ‘things that happen’ (Landweer 2004: 485) and that we feel *in* our felt-body. Climatic impressions or atmospheres, in fact, imply a feeling (depressing or electrifying, exciting or unnerving, etc.) poured out into a space” (Griffero 2010: 55).<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning of the 19th century, atmosphere was understood by its climatic origin. It described the feelings associated with different situation, with air as its purported medium. Here, Griffero explains the way Niebuhr, a historian, describes Rome in 1918. His supposition of atmosphere as a climatic phenomenon, prescribes certain qualities to it that will carry throughout the following decades. Firstly, atmosphere is an entity unlike living beings or objects in that it can be similarly perceived with our senses yet its borders are undeterminable or

<sup>5</sup> Griffero, Tonino. *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces*. Ashgate, 2010.

incomplete, or as Griffero writes: “[Atmospheres] exist in the same way as many other entities that, while being fundamental under the anthropic and mesoscopic perceptive profile, turn out to be superfluous under the predictive-scientific one” (Griffero 2010: 61); in his book “Quasi-Things,” Griffero describes atmosphere as such. In addition to this characteristic, the phenomenon affects our emotive state: it envelopes us, so we cannot seem to look *towards* it, but rather *starting* from it. Functioning like clothing, Griffero calls the phenomenon the “atmospheric bodies of the apparel” and describes these as multi-layered systems, which we inhabit: we can at once experience a discussion with someone that seems stale, all the while enjoying “a Sunday mood” (ibid: 60).

Before atmosphere was connected to architecture, it had a prototypical form in architectural discourse as *character*. Originating from Charles Le Brun’s 1668 lecture “The Expression of the Passions,” the term was concerned with the rhetorical concept of *decorum*, which necessitated that a speech should display the character appropriate for the occasion. In the arts, this translated into a theory of literary styles and musical modes such as the Phrygian, Dorian, Aeolian, and Lydian. The architect Germain Boffrand was the first to translate this theory of expression into the architectural concept of character in his book “Livre d’architecture” in 1745. Transitioning into architecture, appropriateness meant that architectural styles such as the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian were assigned to buildings based on the way the designer wanted its users to interpret the building; Mallgrave writes:

“Because the arts share a common heritage and purpose in playing upon human emotions, Boffrand argues, it is possible to graft the rules for poetry, which “has its different genres; and the style of one does not



suit another,” onto architectural theory. Buildings not only have the general capacity to speak, but the architect should learn to exploit architecture’s ornamental vocabulary in such a way that a rapport is established with the spectator. Thus beauty is but a prelude to a building’s elocutionary purpose: “It is not enough for a building to be handsome; it must be pleasing, and the beholder must feel the character that it is meant to convey.” The orders provide the initial framework for this discourse, yet the typology of character, following the breadth of human emotions, is more effusive and elicits distinct impressions through the smallest nuances of detail” (Mallgrave 2005: 39).<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of character described here is similar to that of modern atmosphere in that it affects its beholders in a way designed by the architect. However, the nuances that convey the character would have meaning in and of themselves — meaning known to the designer and the practitioners of architecture as a whole. Elaborating upon Boffrand’s work, Jacques Francois Blondel added in his book *Architecture Francoise* (1752–6) that it was the “imperceptible nuances” within a piece of architecture that distinguished between the impressions two buildings of one style communicated. He lists over thirty of these, such as ‘manly, firm, virile, light, elegant, delicate, rustic, naive, feminine’ etc (Mallgrave 2005: 40). While the modern concept of atmosphere in architecture recognizes imperceptible nuances in much the capacity as character, the current era does not have discourse about the categorization of different moods in buildings, these having been relegated to matters of subjectivity and “taste,” and thus something outside the realm of academic discussion.

6 Mallgrave, Harry Francis. *Modern architectural theory: a historical survey, 1673-1968*. New York : Cambridge University Press, 2005.

The current understanding of atmosphere necessitated a new focus for architecture, detached from the styles of classicism. This focus would come in the form of architectural *space*, a concept first explored by Karl Schnaase. In his book *Modern Architectural Theory*, Harry Francis Mallgrave writes that during the stylistic discourse of the 1800s, Schnaase’s book *Niederländische Briefe* (1834), presented medieval architecture’s continuous development of interior space as an alternative to classical architecture’s focus on the exterior of a building. According to Schnaase, the subjective spatial experience of ‘a pulsing organic life’ could be viewed as the most important factor in the structural evolution and detailing of medieval architecture. The potential of architectural space was elaborated further by Gottfried Semper in his second book on style (1863). Semper believed that the power of spatial experiences was first raised to an art form by the Romans who — with their ‘perfection’ of the spatial motive of masonry vaulting — created sensations of grandeur linked with their drive for “world domination.” In proclaiming “space in itself a valid realm for architectural consideration,” Semper would influence the course of Germanic theory among other academic currents (ibid: 137, 196). Architecture’s search for meaning in the 1800s would not only make space one of the focuses of modernist architecture but also connect the concept of atmosphere to a building’s interior, detaching it from the exterior character of the building.

Little happened with the concept of atmosphere in the first half of the 20th century with architectural discourse largely revolving around functional and modernist ideals. This however changed with Heidegger’s lecture in Darmstadt in 1951, which brought phenomenology into architecture with the essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking.” In it, Heidegger considers the etymological connection between the German words “bauen” (to build), the



old German “buan” (to dwell), and “ich bin” (I am), from which he concludes that “building is a quintessential form of dwelling. Building and dwelling are, in essence, the clearing of a “place” or the marking of locations for human memories” (Goodman, Mallgrave, 2011: 100).<sup>7</sup> Architecture was inspected from the perspective of a person (being) in a place, creating a precedent for a new qualitative viewpoint: the earlier concept of architectural space became place when the German word for space, “Raum”, was connected to a room, which is an actual physical location (Heidegger 1951, p. 9).<sup>8</sup> Heidegger’s etymological focus also contributed to the rise of structuralism – its search for more universal meanings, compared to phenomenology’s search for meanings in “everyday existence” became a particular interest in the coming decade (Mallgrave 2005: 370). Merleau-Ponty’s book *Phenomenology of Perception* from 1945 also attracted the attention of architect’s, and with its foundations in “bodily experience” described how our consciousness is fundamentally tied to the perceptions afforded to us by our senses. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty supported the idea of the “Umwelt”, which placed the individual and their surroundings into an inseparable relationship: “it is our ability to perceive a particular quality (the color green, for example) that allows it to ‘show up’ as a characteristic of ‘our’ particular world. It is here, at the point of contact between bodily behavior and environmental opportunity, that an organism begins to make sense of its existence and ultimately (...) to emerge into a state of consciousness” (Hale 2017: 2).<sup>9</sup> Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger were instrumental in creating the foundations for the current view of atmosphere

7 Goodman, David. Mallgrave, Harry Francis. *Introduction to Architectural Theory: 1968 to the Present*. Malden, MA : Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

8 Heidegger, Martin. “Building Dwelling Thinking by Martin Heidegger (1951) – Translation and Commentary by Adam Bobeck.” University of Leipzig, 2017

9 Hale, Jonathan. *Merleau-Ponty for Architects*. London: Routledge, 2016.

as experiential phenomena; the concept is predicated on an individual’s felt-body perceiving an experiential phenomenon in particular surroundings.

At this time, the Heideggerian notion of “Stimmung” (mood) also enters architectural discourse in a spatial capacity. The German word explains the atmosphere from a musical perspective, meaning the *attunement* of instruments i.e. how they are accorded to the right tonality and to each other. From this perspective, “moods are not primarily situated in the subjective world but, on the contrary, are rooted in the shared space of musical sound.” Moods do not match emotions, as these are directed towards something, but instead ‘constitute the tonality of the place’ with an indefinite yet pervasive character. In essence, “Stimmungen are a *medium*, which displays *how* situations are experienced” (Guidi 2017: 2-3)<sup>10</sup>; as Heidegger writes:

“A Stimmung is a way, not merely a form or a mode, but a way – in the sense of a melody that does not merely hover over the so-called proper being at hand of man, but that sets the tone for such being, i.e. attunes (stimmt) and determines (be-stimmt) the manner and way of his being” (Heidegger 1983).<sup>11</sup>

Having begun to write his trilogy of books on the meaning of architecture already in the structuralist and semiotic push of the 1960s, Christian Norberg-Schulz created his concluding work *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* in 1979. Here, the author attempted to translate phenomenological discourse ‘into a tool for the generation of architectural forms

10 Guidi, Lucilla. “Moods as Groundlessness of the Human Experience. Heidegger and Wittgenstein on Stimmung.” *Philosophia*, 2017, Vol.45(4), pp.1599-1611.

11 Heidegger, Martin. *Gesamtausgabe (2nd Edition)*, 1983: 29–30 (English Edition); 101/67 (German Edition)



that recreate a semblance of meaningful environments' (Haddad 2010: 98)<sup>12</sup>. Norberg-Schulz marries two concepts, Heidegger's notion of "gathering" and the ancient Roman idea of "Genius Loci" in his thesis:

"The existential purpose of building (architecture) is therefore to make a site become a place, that is, to uncover the meanings potentially present in the given environment."

"Genius Loci is a Roman concept. According to ancient Roman belief every 'independent' being has its genius, its guardian spirit. This spirit gives life to people and places, accompanies them from birth to death, and determines their character or essence. Even the gods had their genius, a fact which illustrates the fundamental nature of the concept" (Norberg-Schulz 1979: 18).<sup>13</sup>

The book details different, characteristic places depicted by a "photo-historiography" together with several historical periods, which are given distinct labels pertaining to their 'spirit.' Norberg-Schulz attempts to connect architecture with 'concrete images' that constitute experiences. According to him "The phenomenological challenge lies (...) in reviving this poetic dimension of things and in re-establishing the lost connection between the various elements that constitute our world." A special emphasis here is placed upon the connection between the man-made world and the natural world, as Norberg-Schulz noted that this theme was historically evident in various places

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12 Haddad, Elie. Christian Norberg-Schulz's Phenomenological Project in Architecture, *Architectural Theory Review*, 15:1, 2010: 88-101.

13 Norberg-Schulz, Christian. *Genius Loci, Towards a phenomenology of Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli, 1979.

around the world (Haddad 2010: 92-93). While the concept of atmosphere was not directly referenced, the book expanded upon the meaning of place for architecture, making it more specific, while introducing the concept of a "poetic" experience into the architectural discourse. The thesis of Norberg-Schulz concerning the "spirit" of a place is also clearly emotive, and implies the "feeling" of a place.

Influenced by *Genius Loci*, Kenneth Frampton wrote the essay titled "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance" in 1983. Here, he attempted to develop an agenda for architecture: "Against current neo-avant-gardism, he proffered the *arriere-garde*, or rearguard position, of critical regionalism, one that was able to 'deconstruct' the superficial world of culture that it inherited as well as to mitigate the positivist or technological forces of universal civilization" (Goodman, Mallgrave 2011: 101). Frampton proposed a focus on "place-form," topography, context, climate, light, tactility, and tectonic form, encouraging a connection to the vernacular tradition of a given place without historicist underpinnings. What was novel however, was Frampton's emphasis on tactility and tectonics: the former implying that architecture was more than a merely visual or semiotic art, and the latter describing form and the detailing of construction as "the structural poetic rather than the representation of a facade" (Frampton 1983: 28).<sup>14</sup> This multi-sensory perspective would serve as another foundation for the current discourse on atmosphere.

The emphasis on senses other than sight would be picked up by Juhani Pallasmaa. With writings since 1985, Pallasmaa has advocated for architecture as a multi-sensory experience (as opposed to a merely visual or conceptual exercise), explaining

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14 Frampton, Kenneth. "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance". In, Foster, H. (ed). *Postmodern Culture*. London; Pluto Press, 1983.



that it “sensitizes our whole physical and mental receptivity” (Pallasmaa 1988: 27).<sup>15</sup> His phenomenology is a development of Merleau-Ponty’s: Pallasmaa subscribes to the notion of perception through one’s “whole being,” which suggests that architecture is fundamentally “an embodied existential experience.” (Pallasmaa 2018: 13).<sup>16</sup> Although Pallasmaa’s work has always proclaimed the importance of the emotive consciousness, and had ties to what would become the atmospheric discourse, he has also recently written about the subject directly:

“Atmospheric experience is also a ‘difficult’ phenomenon, because it is a relational experience, not a definable, namable and measurable object or ‘thing’. It is a ‘quasi-thing’ as Tonino Griffero suggests (Griffero 2017). It also arises from relations and interactions of numerous irreconcilable factors, such as scale, materiality, tactility, illumination, temperature, humidity, sound, color, smell etc., which together constitute the ‘atmosphere’, or actually, our experience of it. We must confess now that all artistic and poetic experiences are similarly relational experiences, and their essences, meanings and emotive characteristics arise from a dynamic interaction of numerous factors and qualities with the human neural system and consciousness, in order to constitute an experience. Poetic and artistic experience also activates our deepest collective and biological memories. Our experiences resonate with our personal and biological histories.” (Pallasmaa 2018: 15)

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15 Pallasmaa, Juhani. “Tradition & Modernity: The Feasibility of Regional Architecture in Post-Modern Society,” *Architectural Review*, 188, 1988.

16 Pallasmaa, Juhani. “Architecture as Experience: The fusion of the world and the self.” *Architectural Research in Finland*, vol.2, no.1, 2018: 9-17.

“Our perception and understanding does not process from details towards entity but the other way around: from entity to details. This is an essential aspect of atmosphere: it is an immediate experience of the whole, the entity, and only later can one distinguish the details that are part of it (Pallasmaa, 2013: 37).<sup>17</sup>

Here we see the concept of atmosphere in its modern form, containing the attributes from past phenomenological discourse with an understanding of the biological process of perception and the elusive, ill-defined nature of the phenomenon: atmosphere is an immediately perceived, “whole” experience that speaks directly to our subconscious.

The most recent, comprehensive descriptions of atmosphere come from Tonino Griffero’s work *Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces* (2010) and Gernot Böhme’s book *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres* (2018). With new definitions for the phenomenon, including the power of affect in our everyday lives (for example in politics or advertising), the authors approach the phenomenon from a broader viewpoint than before, creating a baseline for future discourse of the subject.

“Atmospheres are feelings poured out into space. They are modes of a corporeal predualistic communication that at times is supersubjective and superobjective – the calm before the storm, the fever of the limelight, the numinous, the wind, etc. – and at times is more dependent on the subject, or condensed into (or anchored to) preferential objects” (Griffero 2010: 108).

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17 Havik, Klaske, and Gus Tielens. “Atmosphere, Compassion and Embodied Experience, A Conversation about Atmosphere with Juhani Pallasmaa.” *OASE* 91, 2013.



“Atmosphere is something between the subject and the object; therefore, aesthetics of atmosphere must also mediate between the aesthetics of reception and the aesthetics of the product or of production. (...) An aesthetics of atmospheres pertains to artistic activity that consists in the production of particular receptions, or to the types of reception by viewers or consumers that play a role in the production of the “work” itself” (Böhme 2018: 90-91).<sup>18</sup>

Atmosphere’s meaning as an affective entity is discussed in these two works, connecting aesthetics and atmosphere. As atmosphere’s power becomes aestheticized, its use becomes staged and gains a theatrical and manipulative character. In architecture however, the two authors note that the phenomenon bears great potential for the creation of a new humanist perspective for architecture, while “rehabilitating the ephemeral in the arts” (Böhme 2018; Griffero, Interview 2018).

The development of atmosphere has been an iterative process that has seemingly settled into its definitions and affective properties in Böhme’s and Griffero’s works. An architect’s personal, design-oriented perspective comes from Peter Zumthor’s recent books “Thinking Architecture” (orig. 1999) and “Atmospheres” (orig. 2006). Zumthor places great importance on his intuition, relying on his subconscious memories to provide him with the impetus for design decisions.<sup>19</sup> While his perspective is subjective, it shows an alternative view of atmosphere compared to the affective focus employed by current research, such as the works from Århus university. Headed by Niels Albertsen, this focus touches upon Böhme’s and Griffero’s work, while containing a specific

18 Böhme, Gernot. *The aesthetics of atmospheres*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.

19 As an example, see Zumthor, Peter. *Architektur Denken*. Basel-Boston-Berlin: Birkhäuser, 1999: 16 - 22.

interest in the atmospheres of urban, social networks.<sup>20</sup>

The renewed interest in the ephemeral has produced little scientific research. As Pallasmaa explains, a shift from “physical reality and form to mental reality and emotion” necessitates a change in the methodologies of studies (Pallasmaa 2018, p. 15). The techniques for such work are yet to be found, as atmosphere has proven difficult to measure — or misguided, as Pallasmaa implies. The work of neurophenomenology has not yet provided widely accepted methodologies akin to those employed in empathy research. However, with more research — such as this paper — and growing interest, this may soon change.

## 2.2 Empathy

While it is by no means the only account of empathy within the context of design, one of the more recent and influential accounts was offered by Harry Francis Mallgrave in his book *Modern Architectural Theory, 1673-1968* (2015). Mallgrave’s account here is especially helpful for its synoptic character.

“In 1873 Vischer’s son Robert (1847–1933) places these ideas within the broader context of a theory by coining the word *Einfühlung*. The German word literally means “in-feeling,” but its closest English equivalent is “empathy.” [...] “Here it was shown how the body, in responding to certain stimuli in dreams, objectifies itself in spatial forms. Thus it unconsciously projects its own bodily form – and with this also the soul – into the form of the object. From this I derived the notion that I call ‘empathy’” (Mallgrave 2005: 199).<sup>21</sup>

20 For a selection of Niels Albertsen’s work, see his articles “Atmospheres in the city with/out limits” and “Atmosphere: Power, Critique, Politics. A conceptual analysis.” Citation in References chapter.

21 Mallgrave, Harry Francis. *Modern architectural theory: a historical survey, 1673-1968*. New York : Cambridge University Press, 2005.



The English word “empathy” suggests a simple projection of the emotion we may feel toward an object or person, but the German word *Einfühlung* refers to a more thorough transference of our ego, one in which our whole personality to some extent merges with an object. As Malgrave explains: “the network of impressions that we read into an object of aesthetic capacity, such as a building, is nothing less than the complex sum of the psychological experiences or richness of content that we at the same time project into the artistic form” (Malgrave 2005: 199). The artistic process is thus always self-referential; architecture and its forms thus define our current and collective state of mind.

The transposition of this notion of in-feeling back into architectural theory happened in 1886 in the doctoral dissertation of Heinrich Wölfflin, “Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture.” It opens with the simple question: ‘How is it possible that architectural forms are able to express an emotion or a mood?’ (Malgrave 2005: 200) It lays out the problem in both physiological and psychological terms based on the principle: “Physical forms possess a character only because we ourselves possess a body.” To put it in another way, “the formal expressions that we read into architecture are nothing other than the vital feelings of our own body – the expression of will; a feeling of balance; a sense of regularity, symmetry, proportion, and rhythm. Or in Kantian terms, “Our own bodily organization is the form through which we apprehend everything physical” (Malgrave 2005: 200).

Turning to the subject of empathy, the resources available become much more varied. This is largely due to the fact that those working in the natural sciences (e.g. neuro- and cognitive scientists) as well as the humanities (e.g. philosophers, literary theorists, and art historians) have all sought to understand the

nature of empathy. For my purposes here, I will draw freely on a number of these and other approaches with the aim of synthesizing a relatively coherent understanding of empathy. I will then extend this understanding to the role of empathy in architecture and design from the point of view of both history and practice. To this end, I will start with an explication of the general structure of empathy according to scientists, philosophers, and other researchers; and after this general explication, I will treat empathy in the context of architectural discourse and practice.

First, it is important to note that research into “empathy” — both as a term and concept — is a relatively recent phenomenon, as philosophers Dan Zahavi and John Michael point out in a recent (2018) article:

“The notion of empathy does not have a long history. The German term *Einfühlung* was introduced into the field of social cognition by the psychologist Theodor Lipps at the beginning of the twentieth century and used as a label for our basic understanding of others; an understanding that, according to Lipps, involved a combination of imitation and projection. It was Lipps’s notion that Edward Titchener had in mind when he in 1909 translated *Einfühlung* as ‘empathy’ [...]” (Zahavi and Michael 2018: 589).<sup>22</sup>

In addition to this concise historical contextualization of the emergence of empathy as studiable phenomenon, Zahavi and Michael’s piece is especially useful for my purposes here insofar as with this article, their expressed “aim is to open up a new

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<sup>22</sup> Zahavi, Dan and John Michael. “Beyond Mirroring: 4E Perspectives on Empathy” in *The Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition*. Eds. Albert Newen, Leon De Bruin, and Shaun Gallagher. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018: 589-606.



perspective by exploring the potential of applying embodied, extended, enactive, and embedded approaches to empathy research” (Zahavi and Michael, 2018: 590). In addition to the aim of opening new perspectives and approaches to empathy research, Zahavi and Michael also have the more specific aim of “going beyond the notion of affective matching” popularly articulated by psychologist Paul Bloom in his 2014 article “Against Empathy” published in the *Boston Review* (ibid: 590; my emphasis).<sup>23</sup>

The popular understanding of empathy in terms of “affective matching” employed by researchers such as Theodor Lipps at the beginning of the 20th century, through to Paul Bloom and others here in the first quarter of the 21st century, is, according to Zahavi and Michael, characterized by “drawing inferences about others’ situations and mental states to being motivated to alleviate others’ suffering,” which Bloom, according to Zahavi and Michael, argues could be problematic since “we tend to empathize [in the sense of affective matching] more with those whose needs are salient, who are similar to ourselves, and who are close by. [Thus,] [i]f we want to promote impartiality and fairness, we should consequently put empathy aside” (ibid: 594-95, 595; bracketed comments added). In other words, the problem here with characterizing empathy as mere affective matching seems to be that affective matching narrowly focuses on the ability of one subject to accurately embody in the affective state of another subject. This means that empathy is limited to the sharing of emotional states between two individual subjects, and that this sharing is predicated upon the subject who is doing the empathizing to know what the other subject is experiencing on an affective level. The implication here is that there is no such thing as cognitive empathy; i.e. that an empathizer can understand that the other subject may be in some

23 For Bloom’s own articulation of empathy, see: Bloom, P. “Against Empathy” in *Boston Review*, 39 (5), 2014: 14-19.

particular affective state without the empathizer having to feel the same affective state.

However, against this somewhat narrow characterization of empathy as “affective matching” or what is effectively something like feeling what another person feels, Zahavi and Michael argue that “empathy need not be limited to such a matching relation, and in fact it need not involve such a matching relation at all” (Zahavi and Michael 2018: 602). This is because the authors point out that in addition to affective matching, “empathy is integrated with various other social-cognitive processes, from drawing inferences about others’ situations and mental states, to being motivated to alleviate others’ suffering” (ibid: 603). It is important to note that Zahavi has elsewhere rejected that empathy require “that the empathizer be concerned for the well-being of the target person” (ibid: 599)<sup>24</sup>. Finally, Zahavi and Michael caution that

“rather than promoting a specific account of empathy as the right account, a more reasonable verdict might be that the different analyses of empathy contain various insights that contemporary debates on social cognition and interpersonal understanding ought to incorporate” (Zahavi and Michael 2018: 603).

So, in short, we see that the debates concerning empathy are far from finished and much remains to be settled before we will have a clear and unified account of the phenomenon from the various discourses outside of architecture and design.

24 For a full elaboration of this point, see: Zahavi, D. “Empathy and direct social perception: a phenomenological proposal” in *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 2 (3), 2011: 541-58.



Going back to the historical narrative, the notion of affective matching and what social scientists called “interpersonal empathy” rose in popularity after a study conducted in 1948 by Rosalind Dymond Cartwright and Leonard Cottrell that measured the interpersonal empathic responses of people. In this process, she rejected the idea of projection and instead emphasized the interpersonal connection as “the core of the concept” (Lanzoni 2015)<sup>25</sup>. In the studies that followed, researchers began to differentiate between “true” empathy and what became to be known as “projection.” In 1955, Reader Digest defined “empathy” as the “ability to to appreciate the other person’s feelings without yourself becoming so emotionally involved that your judgement is affected”. In fact, “empathy” became so popular that the English term was translated back into German as “Empathie,” which thus replaced the original meaning of the concept (Lanzoni 2018: 50).<sup>26</sup>

In the following decades, different scales and methods for measuring empathy were developed, yet it was only in 1990 when researchers in Parma, Italy, found mirror neurons; Lanzoni recounts:

“Mirror neurons, observed to fire when a macaque monkey performed an action and when he watched another act, were purported to be the neurobiological underpinning not only of action imitation but also of empathy” (Lanzoni 2018: 51).

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25 Lanzoni, Susan. “A Short History of Empathy.” The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, October 15, 2015: <<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/10/a-short-history-of-empathy/409912/>>.

26 Lanzoni, Susan Marie. *Empathy: a history*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.

This was deemed to be the decisive neuroscientific evidence for empathy. The discovery spurred a wealth of additional research, and mirror neurons were claimed to explain everything from autism to erections (Hickok 2014:10)<sup>27</sup>. Recently however, critique against these brain cells has been brought to light, as it has become apparent that the mirror neurons in monkeys and the “mirror-like” brain responses in humans are different. The need for these brain cells in action and execution has been questioned because of findings indicating that their response is not necessary for an individual to comprehend such sequences (Hickok 2014: 17). Thus, the empathic response is a debated also in terms of its neurological dimension.

Having consulted approaches to empathy outside of design, I now turn back to the deployment of the notion of empathy in architectural and design discourse. Curiously, even though the interest in interpersonal empathy became prevalent in the social sciences and the popular media after the 1950s, the phenomenon has not featured much in architectural discourse since the advent of empathy theory and the concept of *Einfühlung* in the late 1800s. Only now, after the discovery of mirror neurons, have architects displayed renewed interest in the phenomenon. In the seminar readers *Architecture and Empathy* (2015) and *Architecture and Neuroscience* (2013), Sarah Robinson, Michael Arbib, Harry Frances Mallgrave, Vittorio Gallese, and Juhani Pallasmaa discuss the connections between embodied sensations, embodied simulation (intuited experiential phenomena such as atmosphere) and the mirror mechanisms that enable these. According to Mallgrave, 2007 marked the year that art historian David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese first argued about the interpretation of architecture being fundamentally tied to our empathic connection:

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27 Hickok, Gregory. *The myth of mirror neurons : the real neuroscience of communication and cognition*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014.



“Think of how a twisted column induces a state of tension within our bodies, as our mirror systems viscerally simulate the twisting of the column. In the case of the twisted columns and piers in the Portuguese church of the Monastery of Jesus in Setubal, such simulation can be read both symbolically and emotionally. Symbolically, the twisting visually strengthens the supports for assuming the load of the heavy vaults, while emotionally this tense gesture seems entirely appropriate in a chapel that was designed specifically to house the ritual sacrifice of Christ” (Arbib, Mallgrave, Pallasmaa, 2013: 36-37).<sup>28</sup>

As we perceive with our bodies, it is natural that a form of mimesis is applied in order for us to feel our environments around us. The authors argue that in order for us to conceptualize spaces and objects, we subconsciously simulate how said elements would generate an “action responses,” i.e. how they would for example respond to handling and manipulation (Gallese, Mallgrave, Pallasmaa, Robinson 2015: 30).<sup>29</sup>

For the purposes of this paper, the notion of *Einfühlung* is the most appropriate type of empathy, as it describes the manner in which we perceive spatial experiences as well as the way that designers project themselves into their work within their imaginations. However, in order for the research interviews to maintain a comprehensive perspective, we can refer to psychologist C. Daniel Batson’s descriptions of the different types of empathy depicted in his article “These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena”<sup>30</sup>.

28 Arbib, Michael; Pallasmaa, Juhani; Mallgrave, Harry Francis. *Architecture and Neuroscience*. Espoo: Tapio Wirkkala - Rut Bryk Foundation, 2013.

29 Gallese, Vittorio; Mallgrave, Harry Francis; Pallasmaa, Juhani; Robinson, Sarah. *Architecture and Empathy*. Espoo: Tapio Wirkkala - Rut Bryk Foundation, 2015.

30 C. Daniel Batson, “These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but

“the term can now refer to eight different concepts: knowing another’s thoughts and feelings; imagining another’s thoughts and feelings; adopting the posture of another; actually feeling as another does; imagining how one would feel or think in another’s place; feeling distress at another’s suffering; feeling for another’s suffering, sometimes called pity or compassion; and projecting oneself into another’s situation” (Lanzoni 2015).

It is important to note, that while the last definition comes closest to the way *Einfühlung* describes our capacity to feel our way into objects and the natural world, it does not quite match the original definition. Thus, such in-feeling is an addition that will be made to this list for the purposes of this study.

## 2.3 Intuited Atmosphere and Empathy in Architectural Design

The concept of intuited atmosphere (i.e. the feeling of an atmosphere based on an envisaged place) is linked with imagination. As Pallasmaa explains in his book *The Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery in Architecture*, imagination connects our current world with that of memory, recalling past experiences and melding them into our current ones. Based on neurological findings (the influence of mirror neurons), it is not self-explanatory that the act of imagining is different from our everyday perception (Pallasmaa 2011, 36-37)<sup>31</sup>. Nevertheless, research on our intuited capacity in the architectural design field is largely non-existent. Even more apparent, however, is the

Distinct Phenomena,” in *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, ed. Jean Decety and William Ickes. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.

31 Pallasmaa, Juhani. *Imagination and Imagery in Architecture*. London: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2011.



lack of work connecting our capacity for empathy with intuited atmospheres: something that according to Pallasmaa, architects are adept at doing on a regular basis (Pallasmaa, 2013: 41).<sup>32</sup>

Expanding on what I wrote in the last chapter, Vischer's *Einfühlung* from the 1800s appears to create a direct connection between atmosphere and empathy. According to Harry Francis Mallgrave, Merleau-Ponty described *Einfühlung* as follows:

‘Our ontological relationship with the world is such that “we are already *in* the being thus described, and we *are of it*, that between it and us there is *Einfühlung*,” and what this means is that “my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world *reflects* it,” and it encroaches upon the world’ (Mallgrave 2010: 113).<sup>33</sup>

The German origin of empathy ties into Gernot Böhme's explanation of atmosphere as the ‘prototypical “between”-phenomenon’: according to him, ‘Atmospheres are in fact characteristic manifestations of the co-presence of subject and object’ (Böhme 2018, p. 91)<sup>34</sup>. Following these two thoughts, it appears that *Einfühlung* and atmosphere share the same field — the medium between people and their surroundings — with atmosphere in physical spaces being the primary emotive influencer due to its totality but with *Einfühlung* creating our primary connection to our imagined spaces through projection. The manner in which

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32 Havik, Klaske, and Gus Tielens. “Atmosphere, Compassion and Embodied Experience, A Conversation about Atmosphere with Juhani Pallasmaa.” *OASE* 91, 2013.

33 Mallgrave, Harry Francis. *The architect's brain: neuroscience, creativity, and architecture*. Chichester, West Sussex, U.K. ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

34 Böhme, Gernot. *The aesthetics of atmospheres*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.

the two phenomena interact in an architect's intuited design work would at times blend them inseparably together as no distinct spatial totalities can be characterized within one's imagination without artistic projection and in-feeling.

With such a fundamentally close relationship, it is curious that, prior to this paper, imagination, atmosphere, and empathy have not been the subjects of a conducted study, as their connection could serve to give architect's a greater understanding about the crucial roles these phenomena play in their design processes. Zumthor's self-reflective architectural writings seem to depict an intuitive connection between these subjects (Zumthor 1999: 32)<sup>35</sup>, yet as subjective explorations, they do not set out to define or prove the existence of this connection. The thesis of my study lies in its attempt to create a methodology for the research of these inter-related phenomena, and prove Pallasmaa's hypothesis: empathy acts as the medium connecting architects to intuited atmospheres while they design.

## 2.3 Phenomenology

Given that phenomenology plays a primary role in this thesis, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the subject. While the term “phenomenology” has been used by philosophers since at least the work of Immanuel Kant, the German term “Phänomenologia” is thought to have been first used by Kant's friend and correspondent, the Swiss polymath Johann Heinrich Lambert in his *Neues Organon* (1764); the philosopher David W. Smith explains:

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35 Zumthor, Peter. *Architektur Denken*. Basel-Boston-Berlin: Birkhäuser, 1999.



“Originally, in the 18th century, ‘phenomenology’ meant the theory of appearances fundamental to empirical knowledge, especially sensory appearances. The Latin term ‘Phenomenologia’ was introduced by Christoph Friedrich Oetinger in 1736. Subsequently, the German term ‘Phänomenologia’ was used by Johann Heinrich Lambert, a follower of Christian Wolff. Immanuel Kant used the term occasionally in various writings, as did Johann Gottlieb Fichte. In 1807, G. W. F. Hegel wrote a book titled *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (usually translated as *Phenomenology of Spirit*). By 1889 Franz Brentano used the term to characterize what he called ‘descriptive psychology’. From there Edmund Husserl took up the term for his new science of consciousness, and the rest is history” (Woodruff 2018).<sup>36</sup>

The word “phenomenology” itself, broken down into its constituents (phenomenon + logos), straightforwardly means something like the “logic of phenomenon” and it has come to denote a collection of closely-interrelated approaches to philosophy which came to fruition in the German-speaking world during the latter half of the 19th century. However, it is important to note that the practice of phenomenology is itself a method or approach to philosophy; that is, phenomenology is a way of doing philosophy. This is confirmed by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who states in his early work the *Phenomenology of Perception* that “Phenomenology is only accessible to a phenomenological method” (“Preface”: xxi).<sup>37</sup> So, said plainly and perhaps somewhat oversimplified,

36 Smith, David Woodruff. “Phenomenology” at *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 2018: <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/>>.

37 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. Donald A.

phenomenologists just try to understand the logic of phenomena, which can mean either (or both) a specific phenomenon or the way that phenomena as such are able to “show up,” as many phenomenologists tend to phrase it.

That the phraseology of “showing up” or “the structure of appearance as such” is obscure is itself likely one of the reasons that phenomenology as philosophical method can be difficult to understand for the uninitiated. However, the obscurity of the phenomenological mode of discourse can also be seen as a helpful heuristic for getting a grasp on the topic. This is because, in a sense, phenomenology as a mode of inquiry often begins by taking a step back from what is most obvious in our ordinary, everyday experiences in an effort to direct our attention to the more extraordinary aspects internal to, or embedded within, such experiences. The Danish philosopher Dan Zahavi describes the starting point of the phenomenological method as arising out of the fact of our fundamental immersion in a world — an immersion (Zahavi uses the term “relation”) which is so basic and natural that we often fail to recognize that such immersion is the case, much less how it even is possible in the first place; Zahavi writes:

“Our relation to the world is so fundamental, so obvious and natural, that we normally do not reflect upon it. It is this domain of ignored obviousness that phenomenology seeks to investigate. The task of phenomenology is not to obtain new empirical knowledge about different areas in the world, but rather to comprehend the basic relation to the world that is [pre-]supposed by any such empirical investigation. [...] The world is, as Merleau-Ponty writes, wonderful. It

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Landers. London: Routledge, 2014.



is a gift and a riddle. But in order to realize this, it is necessary to suspend our ordinary blind and thoughtless taking [of] the world for granted” (Zahavi 2019: 67; bracketed comments added).<sup>38</sup>

So here Zahavi reminds us that the very fact of our existence in the world is something that can be wondered about and in some way understood by means of a certain self-reflexivity about experience itself.

If phenomenology is in some sense an effort to understand experience from within experience, then this raises certain (epistemological) questions about how phenomenology defines knowledge. This is one aspect of phenomenology that makes it unique as a philosophical methodology. That is to say, phenomenology takes experience itself to be the criterion of truth; as Brown and Toadvine state:

“Phenomenology takes its starting point in a return to the ‘things’ or ‘matters’ themselves, that is, the world as we experience it. In other words, for phenomenologists, experience must be treated as the starting point and ultimate court of appeal for all philosophical evidence” (Brown and Toadvine 2003: xi).<sup>39</sup>

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38 Zahavi, Dan. *Phenomenology: The Basic*. London: Routledge, 2018. In accordance with Zahavi’s remarks, Merleau-Ponty also points out that “[t]he perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence. This thesis does not destroy either rationality or the absolute. It only tries to bring them down to earth” (Merleau-Ponty, M. “The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences,” in *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics*. Ed. & tr. James M. Edie. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964: 13).

39 Brown, Charles S. and Toadvine, Ted (eds.). *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003.

In other words, phenomenology shares a certain lineage with the philosophical approach known as Empiricism insofar as experience is seen as the primary — if not the only — means of acquiring knowledge. However, in contrast to common characterizations of Empiricism, which tend to say that Empiricism starts from the supposition that all knowledge is derived from the “content” delivered to us by our various senses, phenomenology’s supposition is that the “matter” or “content” of experience (i.e. that which is experienced) can in some sense be the mind or experience itself. This is perhaps why the German philosopher Edmund Husserl had defined phenomenology as “the science of the essence of consciousness” (Husserl, *Ideas I* §§33ff.).<sup>40</sup> In other words, it is the structure(s) of conscious experience — which are themselves the conditions of any possible experience of any phenomenon at all — that the phenomenologist attempts to investigate and describe. Irish philosopher Dermot Moran articulates this in the following way:

“Phenomenology is best understood as a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophizing, which emphasizes the attempt to get to the truth of the matters, to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer. As such, phenomenology’s first step is to seek to avoid all misconstructions and impositions placed on experience in advance, whether these are drawn from religious or cultural traditions, from everyday common sense, or, indeed, from science itself. Explanations are not to be imposed before the phenomena have been understood from within” (Moran 2000: 4).<sup>41</sup>

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40 “*Ideas I*” refers to: Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*. Trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014.

41 Moran, Dermot. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London: Routledge, 2000.



Moran is here consonant with Heidegger, who states — albeit in a much more obscure fashion than Moran — that phenomenology means “[t]o let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 58).<sup>42</sup> By attempting to avoid any imposition of theories external to experience itself, phenomenology tries to avoid any kind of straightforward rationalism, which is often accused of applying “a priori principles” or “innate ideas” in a kind of “top down” way to our understanding of the world. To be sure, though, the question of whether phenomenology is a form of Empiricism or rationalism is a difficult one to settle, and I have no intention here to do so.

Perhaps the more interesting and more difficult question of what makes phenomenology unique as a philosophical method, though, is that for many phenomenologists, the meaning of “itself” is almost always correlated to thinking, or even to a subject who is doing the thinking, with respect to the existence or being of a given phenomenon itself. Heidegger articulates this indissoluble link between thinking and being as follows:

“The independence of things at hand from humans is not altered through the fact that this very independence as such is possible only if humans exist. The being in themselves of things not only becomes unexplainable without the existence of humans, it becomes utterly meaningless; but this does not mean that the things themselves are dependent upon humans” (Heidegger, *AM* 173-74).<sup>43</sup>

42 Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. San Francisco: Harper, 1962.

43 “AM” refers to: Heidegger, Martin. *Aristotle’s “Metaphysics” Q 1–3: On the Essence and Actuality of Force*. Trans. Walter Brogan and Peter Warnek.

To restate, Heidegger makes two observations here. First, he points out that an explanation is a human practice, distinctly suited to human ends of understanding the being of our worlds and the entities therein. Second, he notes that entities as “things-in-themselves” do not necessarily depend on us, but that any talk about their existence or being is, again, a human activity carried out for human ends. I take this to mean essentially that when we say this or that <sup>44</sup>entity exists, it tells us nothing about the existence of that entity independently of us humans. Rather, talk of existence only tells us that we as humans have encountered and are aware of those aspects of this or that entity which are intelligible to us. This is why Heidegger writes:

“[I]t must be stated that the entity as an entity is ‘in itself’ and independent of any apprehension of it. Accordingly, the being of the entity is found only in encounter and can be explained, made understandable, only from the phenomenal exhibition and interpretation of the structure of encounter” (Heidegger, *HCT* 217).<sup>45</sup>

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Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

44 Cf. with what Heidegger says elsewhere in his essay “History of the Concept of ‘Time’” (*HCT*) concerning the lack of explanation about the meaning of the notion of the “it-itself”; he writes: “It is customary to point out that the world is first there not on account of a subject, the world is rather ‘in-itself’. The frequent use of this expressions ‘in-itself’ of course never tells us anything about its sense. The opinion seems to be that the self-evidence in which this character of the enviroing world is experienced is tantamount to a categorial self-evidence. But what is clearly experienced as *ontically* [i.e. naturally, in an everyday fashion] self-evident need not be *ontologically* [i.e. philosophically, or metaphysically] clear at all. The opposite holds true here and in all similar cases. Nothing at all has been said ontologically when the expression ‘in-itself’ is used without further clarification” (Heidegger, *HCT* 197; bracketed comments added)

45 “*HCT*” refers to: Heidegger, Martin. *History of the Concept of Time*. Trans. Theodore Kisiel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.



What I take this interest in the notion of an “in itself” to suggest is that one of the core concerns of phenomenology is the attempt to address so-called “naïve realism”, or, the view the entities which we encounter in our everyday lives are simply and straightforwardly exist in the same way we encounter them independently of us and essentially so. On this point, Finnish philosopher Johanna Oksala contends that it is best to understand “phenomenology as a groundbreaking critique of naturalism” (Oksala 2016: 6).<sup>46</sup> She elaborates this as follows:

“The key methodological procedure of phenomenology, bracketing or reduction, is intended precisely to break with our ‘natural attitude,’ the attitude in which the world simply consists of the various objects, events, and states of affairs as they appear around us, whether these be women, rain, or globalization. The aim of phenomenology is to problematize natural realism by asking how these objects or states of affairs are constituted in one’s experience. Phenomenologists have typically applied the method of bracketing to perceptual experience: they bracket the ‘transparency’ of experience—the way our attempts to describe or reflect on experience normally bring into view only the experienced world and not the experience itself. By contrast, in the phenomenological attitude, my experience or perception itself becomes the object of thought and awareness. For example, I am able to recognize the way that I can actually only perceive those aspects of things that are visible from my perspective, yet I experience a three-dimensional reality. The

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<sup>46</sup> Oksala, Johanna. *Feminist Experiences: Foucauldian and Phenomenological Investigations*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016.

process by which reality is constituted in my perceptual experience—the way in which perceptual experience acquires world-presenting content—can thus be opened to philosophical investigation” (ibid. 6).

Stated another way, then, naïve realism, as our “natural attitude”, simply asserts (a) the existence of mind-independent objects, and (b) asserts that the way these objects appear to us in our natural attitude is in fact the way these objects are (or work) essentially and forever — and all of this without any explanation of why this is the case. By contrast, and echoing Oksala, phenomenology rejects naïve realism and instead attempts to provide an explanation for both (a) how there can be entities at all (i.e. metaphysics), and (b) what are the kinds or sorts of these entities (i.e. ontology) — and again, both of these from the starting point of human experience, since experience constitutes the only “given” starting point for humans.

However, before moving on, there is one particular criticism of phenomenology coming from within contemporary philosophy which I will address, since it has gained a lot of traction within the intellectual world of architecture and design. This criticism is expressed most influentially by one of the key progenitors of the “speculative realist” movement, Quentin Meillassoux, in his book *After Finitude*, where he accuses contemporary phenomenology of what he calls “correlationism”; he writes:

“By ‘correlation’ we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. We will henceforth call correlationism any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined.



Consequently, it becomes possible to say that every philosophy which disavows naive realism has become a variant of correlationism” (*After Finitude* 4).<sup>47</sup>

In other words, according to Meillassoux and others who reject “correlationism”, the partisans of phenomenology maintain that there is no such thing as “being” apart from “thinking”, which is precisely the position Heidegger articulates above.<sup>48</sup> By contrast, the various partisans of speculative realism seek to affirm the naive realism entailed by the natural attitude, and by extension, wish to affirm the non-human (or non-subjectivist) agency belonging to “that outside,” — i.e. the mind-independent dimensions of the world —, which is “not relative to us” and which traditionally (i.e. before Kant’s critical philosophy) was “given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself regardless of whether we are thinking of it or not” (*After Finitude* 7). It is, then, the affirmation of this so-called “outside” (which is itself, I note, a concept) that seems to be the primary motivation behind the speculative realism.

47 Meillassoux, Quentin. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Trans. Ray Brassier. London: Bloomsbury, 2017. Meillassoux also adds, “Correlationism consists in disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another. Not only does it become necessary to insist that we never grasp an object ‘in itself’, in isolation from its relation to the subject, but it also becomes necessary to maintain that we can never grasp a subject that would not always-already be related to an objectâ” (*ibid.* 5).

48 Graham Harman affirms the correlationist criticism by claiming that phenomenologists “assume” (despite the fact that many phenomenologists explicitly *argue* that [cf. the above passages by Heidegger]) the world and human subjects cannot be thought apart from one another. Harman writes: “[a]uthors working in the continental tradition have generally claimed to stand beyond the traditional dispute between realism (‘reality exists outside our mind’) and idealism (‘reality exists only in the mind’). The correlationist alternative, so dominant that it is often left unstated by its adherents, is to assume that we can think neither of human without world nor of world without human, but only of a primordial correlation or rapport between the two” (Harman, Graham. *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the making*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2011: 2).

Now before responding to speculative realism on behalf of phenomenology, it should first be noted that while among phenomenologists any simplistic or naive realism is ultimately rejected, there are nevertheless aspects of the impulse toward realism which are explicitly affirmed. Heidegger, for example, writes that “[e]very realism is right to the extent that it attempts to retain Dasein’s [i.e. human existence’s] natural consciousness of the extantness of the world. But it [realism] immediately falls short in attempting to explain this reality by means of the real itself” (Heidegger, HCT 223; bracketed comment added).<sup>49</sup> So, whatever the actual degree of difference between phenomenology and speculative realism, it is clear that the two are not wholly at odds with one another. However, whether the so-called “speculative realist” accusations against phenomenology carry any philosophical substance can, I think, be established by whether these speculative realists themselves provide a satisfactory account of how it is that we know (a) whether any objects exist outside of experience (i.e. independently of a thinking subject) and (b) how we can know what these objects are like “in-themselves” (again,

49 Harman, again, is more hyperbolic than descriptive when he asserts that the link between thought and the world is an “unspoken central dogma” rather than a position which has been continually put forward and defended by means of philosophic argumentation: “Whereas realists assert the existence of a world independent of human thought and idealists deny such an autonomous world, correlationism adopts an apparently sophisticated intermediate position, in which human and world come only as a pair and cannot be addressed outside their mutual correlation. Accordingly, the dispute between realism and idealism is dismissed as a ‘pseudo-problem’. Inspired ultimately by Immanuel Kant, correlationists are devoted to the human-world correlate as the sole topic of philosophy, and this has become *the unspoken central dogma* of all continental and much analytic philosophy” (Harman, *Meillassoux*: vii; my emphasis). For an in-depth and wide-ranging account of both continental and analytic arguments in defense of the essential nature of the link between thought and the world, see: Braver, Lee. *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007; and Moore, A.W. *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011.



that is, independently of any thinking carried out by a subject). In short, the burden for the speculative realist is to demonstrate the existence and/or character of any given mind-independent object without making any kind of appeal to, or use of, thinking. Simply asserting that there are objects which exist independently of our understanding does not amount to a demonstration of the existence and character of any such objects; rather, it merely attempts to validate speaking about such objects as if they have an existence independent of our thinking/understanding of them, which may well be useful for practical purposes, but is not necessarily true in the final analysis.

Again, whether this settles the ongoing debates between partisans of phenomenology and speculative (or other forms of) realism is not my intention here, and is, in all likelihood, outside of my current skill set.<sup>50</sup> But the fact that such a debate exists today at least suggests that the wholesale abandonment of phenomenology is not yet necessary or even desirable. Furthermore, it seems to me, extending Heidegger's thoughts above, that architecture is always *architecture*-for a user or groups of users; that is, when we design buildings, we design them for people, not as objects-in-themselves. Given this, architects and designers can benefit much more from a theoretical foundation — like phenomenology — that embraces this fact, rather than any theory which seeks to suppress or deny it.

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50 For an expert discussion of the debate between phenomenology and speculative realism, see: Zahavi, Dan. "The End of What? Phenomenology vs. Speculative Realism." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2016): 289-309: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2016.1175101>>; and: Toadvine, Ted. "The Elemental Pasta" in *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2014): 262-279: <doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15691640-12341288>>.

### 3. Methodology and Data

The Methodology of the research and my position as the researcher is discussed in this section. The design of the research is based on my previous interview study, "The Will State of Architecture – Preliminary Research on the Meaning of the Finnish Term" conducted as a bachelor's thesis at Aalto University's architecture program in 2014. The aim is to create a more scientifically rigorous study than before and to delve deeper into the information that an open interview study can provide. The methodological focus is developed further by a deeper understanding of the background material connected to the phenomena of atmosphere and empathy: the writings of Juhani Pallasmaa, Tonino Griffiro, and Harry Francis Malgrave (among others) provide an academic basis for the study. It is also notable, that the phenomenological perspective discussed in chapter 2 informs the research methodology and the analysis of the data collection. I maintain a reflexive and personal viewpoint to the research data and to my position as a professional in the field of architecture — with the biases and limitations that that entails.

#### 3.1 The Research Process and its Design

The research process began with a discussion with Juhani Pallasmaa. It was his suggestion that I concentrate on atmosphere and/or empathy in my research. The subjects were connected by inspecting them from the viewpoint of the architectural design process: there had been no prior research that directly discussed the convergence the two phenomena. I then decided that interviewing notable architects on both subjects would provide the study with a set of varied, yet equally significant perspectives



— something that such highly personal subject matter would require. The interviews would also guide the analysis of the research as well as limiting necessary background reading; it was assumed that the interviewees would naturally gravitate towards certain themes in their answers, which could then be explored further.

The following architects were chosen as interviewees: Juhani Pallasmaa, Billie Tsien and Tod Williams (they work as a couple), Juha Leiviskä, Adam Caruso, Johan Celsing, Rick Joy, Steven Holl, and Emanuel Christ. The list of architects is presented in the order in which the interviews took place; and will be presented in the next chapters as well. The architects were chosen by me based on their perceived history with the creation of architecture predicated on the creation of distinct atmospheres, as well as on the basis of recommendations from Juhani Pallasmaa and Esa Laaksonen. The connections of the two thesis advisors were vital in getting the interviewees to participate in the research.

The primary reasoning behind the choice of interviewees was the assumption that an architect would need to be experienced to answer questions regarding the research subjects: they would need to have designed and built several buildings in order to have an understanding about how their intuited experiences become actualized upon the completion of architectural projects. In fact, it was presumed that the older an architect was, the better their understanding of the intuited design process would be. Because of this, the study attempted to contact two generations of architects: a younger generation, with people between the ages of 50 and 64, and an older generation, with people between the ages of 70 and 84. These two generations of architects could be compared in the findings of the study; though due to the small sample size, and the fairly arbitrary choice of age ranges, the research would most likely not result in any explicit results.

The interviewees were chosen from three different countries. While the choice of architects was predicated on a perception of their prior knowledge of the research subjects, their design environments would also factor into their knowledge and opinions. Because of this, it was decided that more variety in terms of design contexts would be beneficial: the first geographic region to be represented would be the Nordic countries, due to the expected audience of the research, the second country would be Switzerland, due to the perception that Swiss architecture excelled in the creation of atmospheric spaces, and the third country would be the United States of America, due to the high pedigree of academically inclined architects working there. Finnish and Swiss architecture was historically associated with phenomenology and provided a contrast to the more robust and varied academic landscape of the American architects. In addition to this, I have personally studied in all of these places, meaning that I would have first-hand experience that would help in interpreting the findings of the study. It should be noted however, that Adam Caruso is considered here a Swiss architect due to the history and success of his office in Switzerland; he is originally Canadian.

The interviews were meant to be conducted face-to-face or via internet phone call but due to the busy professional lives of many of the interviewees, this was not always possible. Juhani Pallasmaa, Billie Tsien and Tod Williams, Juha Leiviskä, Adam Caruso, Johan Celsing, and Rick Joy were all spoken to live but Steven Holl and Emanuel Christ were not. Live interviews were chosen over written ones, as I believed that written answers would not provide the necessary material for an in-depth study: due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, and the subconscious processes that constitute a great portion of architectural design



work, I thought that it was just as important to know how the interviewees answered the research questions, as it was to know what they actually said. Meaning, as well as the method of speaking, were thus deemed equally important.

The interviewees were all approached by email. Upon agreeing to take part in the research, they were sent the interview questions and the name of the research. All of the interviewees were approached in the beginning of March 2018, with the interviews taking place from then until the end of May. This meant that some of the architects had more time to ponder the questions — but likely did not due to their busy schedules. None of the interviewees (except for Pallasmaa) knew beforehand or during the interview, who the other interviewees were.

It must be noted that two of the architects had clearly differing interviews compared to the rest. Johan Celsing was originally scheduled for a single interview but was inevitably not asked any of the questions during the course of it, as he desired to first explain his design methodology to me. He answered the interview questions during a second video call. The second exception was Rick Joy, who ended up first answering the questions in writing but later agreed to also answer them in a live interview.

The interview questions were chosen based on the perceived nature of atmosphere and empathy. Atmosphere is spoken about directly with the interviewees in order to ascertain their view of it. Empathy, however, is not, and is instead subject to a practical discussion intended to depict its significance to the interviewees. The questions are thus divided into two parts.

- 1. Are you conscious of atmospheres in your design process?**
- 2. How would you define atmosphere?**
- 3. How would you describe the role of**

**atmosphere in buildings during the design process?**

- 4. How does the perception of the intuited atmosphere affect your mood during the design process? Does this have implications for the design process itself?**

The first questions focus on atmosphere, which is defined by each architect in their respective interviews. It is estimated that the architects have been asked this in the past as the subject has been discussed in numerous articles. It has also been noted prior to this study, that each of the interviewees has been associated with the phenomenon in the past. Atmosphere functions as the stepping stone to further questions then. Its definition and the architects' relationship with it guide the interview. The research questions are not stated clearly but probed through questions highlighting the differing approaches one might consider when speaking about their constituents. The questions aim to garner implicit answers in order for their comparisons to display the distinctive traits of the interviewees

The definition of atmosphere influencing the interview questions comes from an abstracted description by Tonino Griffèro. In one of his more recent articles, he divides the phenomenon of atmosphere into three separate manifestations. According to him, a place has a distinct atmosphere that is embedded into its spatial dimensions and materiality. Atmosphere is then perceived intuitively by the beholder upon arriving to the place. The atmosphere then affects the mood of the beholder, which constitutes the “feeling of atmosphere.” (Böhme, Griffèro, Thibaud, Pallasmaa, 2015: 42-43)<sup>51</sup> This separation can be seen plainly in the interview questions, which describe the phenomenon of atmosphere as something inherent to an imagined place, as well as question whether this inherent aspect has an effect on the mood of a person.

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<sup>51</sup> Böhme, Gernot; Griffèro, Tonino; Thibaud, Jean-Paul, and Juhani Pallasmaa. *Architecture and Atmosphere*. Espoo: Tapio Wirkkala - Rut Bryk Foundation, 2015.



Despite an underlying definition embedded in the questions themselves, the architects are asked to define atmosphere in their own terms. This is used to not only create a baseline for each interview but to also help in the analysis of the phenomenon: atmosphere cannot be defined comprehensively but its characteristics can be used to facilitate a discussion that depicts the perspectives of the interviewees.

**5. How do your client's wishes affect the design process?**

**6. How does the projected beholder of the building affect the design process?**

**7. How does the building and its unfolding design affect the design process?**

**8. Which of these aspects (questions 5, 6, 7) do you find is the most important regarding their effect on the design process?**

Empathy is considered the more sensitive subject when compared to atmosphere. The word is not mentioned directly in the interviews but instead clarified with questions that focus on the different intuited roles that the phenomenon can play in the design process: the architects are essentially asked to place themselves in the roles of different people associated with the design of an imagined building. Empathy is viewed as the facilitator that makes an architect an agent in their imaginative realm.

The first two questions have a practical focus for the empathic connection: it is easy to imagine oneself in place of the client or the beholder of a building. These work to further ease the interviewee into the discussion and to highlight his or her hierarchical views: does an interviewee for example consider the beholder more important than the client? The third question speaks of the unfolding design, and personifies a creative power within the pro-

cess itself. The question asks the architects whether they see themselves as the guiding force of their design work, or whether they feel that something subconscious is pulling the project forward. This creative force could also be regarded as a type of intuited genius loci, imagined without a building but still clearly personified as an entity. The final question concludes the interview by directly asking directly whether the architects notice a concrete hierarchy in their design process.

All of the interviews are transcribed, and each of them is sent back to the respective interviewee. The architects are then given a chance to clear up or correct anything they have said and given a chance to add further thoughts.

Certain problems associated with this study were clear from the beginning. Firstly, the sample size is small: the thesis format restricts the breadth of the research that can be carried out, and thus also the number of architects that can be interviewed. Secondly, a modicum of bias is associated with the study. The method with which the architects were chosen was based upon their perceived public images, which naturally differed from their actual personas and thus created a biased starting point. Also, the interviewee choices were greatly influenced by my advisors, relying on the experience and connections that they had in the field of architecture. This brought with it further bias in the form of their assumptions and beliefs. The interviewees were all older architects — due to the presumed necessity for experience — which created another problem for the study: namely, the gender disparity in the older generations of architects. What follows then, is that Billie Tsien is the only female architect featured in this study.

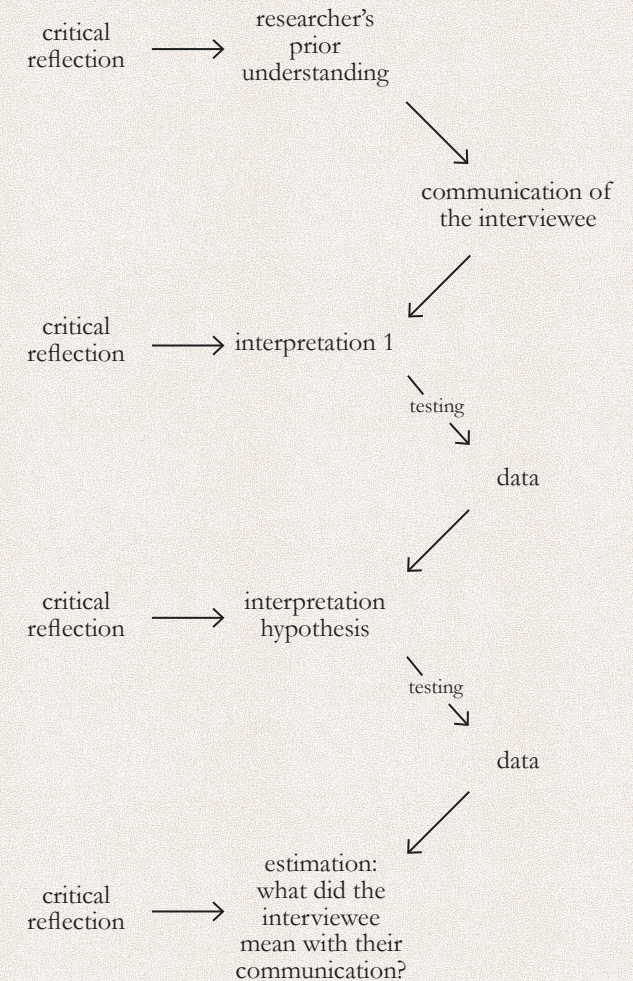


### 3.2 Analysis Methodology

As a phenomenological study, the data analysis is particular to each interview but maintains a consistency due to the connection with my subjective perception — I alone interpret the meaning of the interviews. A dialogue is established with the collected data, producing a set of interpretations, and finally, the main findings of the study. This hermeneutic cycle (see opposite) should gradually rid me of a self-centered viewpoint and bring me closer to the meanings carried by each interviewee's words.<sup>52</sup>

The phenomenological analysis begins already in the interview situation: I write down my initial thoughts of each interviewee together with notes about how I perceive the atmosphere of the interview situation at its start and at its end. These thoughts are meant to be as honest and as immediate as possible. After returning back to the data, I assess my initial thoughts, and after gaining distance to the interviews themselves, am able to look at my thoughts in a critical light, deducting the immediacy of the situation from my assessment. By doing this, I attempt to remove my preconceptions regarding the interviewee from my analysis. I then write down a condensed version of each interview, followed by my interpretations of the answers present in them. Then, I return to the beginning, and go through the aforementioned steps once more. After this second cycle of interpretation, I should have a hypothesis for the meaning of the architects' answers as a result of my work. Once I had completed this process, I again returned to the data, and through further critical reflection, produce the main findings of the research.

<sup>52</sup> For a description of this process and that of the phenomenological interview, see Valli, Raine. *Ikkunoita tutkimusmetodeihin*. Jyväskylä: PS-Kustannus, 2001.





This gradual process of understanding focuses on the research questions outlined in the introductory chapter. Because of this, other interpretations of the interviewees' answers are left with less emphasis. Thus, the research focus has a natural tendency to steer my mind towards the assumptions that best serve the study, despite my best attempts at critical self-reflection — a potential downside to the phenomenological method outlined above.

## **Interviews**

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### 3.3 Data

In this section I present summaries of each of the interviews in the order in which they took place. The summaries are written in a neutral tone, with as few interpretations as possible, based on complete, written transcriptions and recordings of the interviews. The answers of each interviewee are presented chronologically, with each corresponding answer under each question, making the section a chronological display of what was said. The bracketed text in the citations of this section depicts additions and clarifications to the words of the interviewees.

#### Interview with Juhani Pallasmaa

27.2.2018 | *in-person at interviewee's office* | *duration 22 minutes* | *Finnish, age 81*

##### 1. Are you conscious of atmospheres in your design process?

Pallasmaa states that he is conscious of atmospheres while designing. He remarks that the experiential aspect of architecture has always been very important for him but that he has only thought of this phenomenon as atmosphere for the last 15 years.

##### 2. How would you define atmosphere?

Previously, Pallasmaa would have used words such as inner identity, cohesion, consistency or the feeling of a building to describe atmosphere. Ever since he has started to focus on the phenomenon under the word atmosphere, he has been more conscious of its non-intellectual or non-focused impact, as atmosphere is something that affects you without the need for your attention. Pallasmaa says that he has stopped designing buildings but believes that the phenomenon was important to him when he still practiced as an architect as it is still important in his current writing work. He states that upon studying someone else's work, atmosphere could be described as the "overall impact," "the overall feeling" or the "tunement of the work".

##### 3. How would you describe the role of atmosphere in buildings during the design process?

The architect comments that the role of the phenomenon is stronger the further on the design process is. This is because one not only has more ingredients to develop the atmosphere at a later



stage of the process but also because it can be considered the “carrying attitude”. Atmosphere can manifest itself without conscious effort already in the beginning of a design process as an “inkling of (...) a complete experience”, and then manifest slowly as the design becomes more concrete.

#### **4. How does the perception of the intuited atmosphere affect your mood during the design process? Does this have implications for the design process itself?**

Pallasmaa emphasizes that while atmosphere has an effect on his mood during the design process, his mood also has an effect on the atmosphere, because it has created the phenomenon. Atmosphere is a dialogue “between what you [yourself] are” and “what you are doing”. Pallasmaa speaks of a talent to “work with your own work,” meaning that it is a skill to let the working process guide one’s intentions, perhaps away from what one originally planned. The intuited atmosphere and the working process interact.

#### **5. How do your client’s wishes affect the design process?**

The interviewee says that a client’s wishes are another dialogue that informs the design process. This dialogue may not just be between the architect and the client, but also between the architect and his imagined, idealized version of the client — for example when an architect is designing for an institution. Pallasmaa remarks that as a designer internalizes the client, the dialogue starts to take place within his own mind. This is important in order to clarify the purpose of the building, and according to Pallasmaa, often more important than the guidelines the designer receives directly from the client. The interviewee believes that it is crucial

to design for an idealized client, because in architecture “everything has to be raised from normality,” lest the design become too prosaic.

#### **6. How does the projected beholder of the building affect the design process?**

Pallasmaa notes that what he said earlier applies here as well: it would be an error for an architect to think too much about the user of the building. An architect has to create their own understanding of the client in order to elevate the design to the level of poetic experience. A designer must think beyond everyday practicalities in order for the project to “turn into architecture”. A successful end result creates an atmosphere.

#### **7. How does the building and its unfolding design affect the design process?**

According to Pallasmaa, an architect gradually constructs the building in their mind during the design process. Toward the end of the process, the imagined building is as precise as if it had been built, and the designer’s relationship with their own intention has changed. Because of this, it becomes difficult for the architect to abandon their idea — the process of construction has created a mental investment in it. Pallasmaa believes, that despite the hardship, it is important for the designer to have the process change their original idea, as this is characteristic of the work of a “wise craftsman or (...) artist.” The interviewee goes on to explain his criticality toward the value of design concepts, as they intellectualize things. For example, there is little connection between concepts and atmosphere, because the former is an “intellectual category” and the latter an “experiential and emotional category.”



**8. Which of these aspects (questions 5, 6, 7) do you find is the most important regarding their effect on the design process?**

Pallasmaa believes that all of the aspects are necessary but that the “process” itself is the most important. He feels that as a teacher, it is important to be mindful of what students are aiming to do, as later on their professional work becomes a part of it. Instead of formalistic or aestheticized goals, students should be “educated to seek something (...) inside themselves.” An understanding of oneself is essential for the ability to empathize. Education should be a process where the student’s self-identity is developed. This in turn reflects the student’s understanding of the world, and both comprise their future professional work. Pallasmaa concludes, that education should make students conscious of their sense of self.

**Interview with Billie Tsien and Tod Williams**

*27.3.2018 | live interview via internet audio call | duration 35 minutes | American, ages 70 and 75*

**1. Are you conscious of atmospheres in your design process?**

Tsien associates atmosphere with “a sense of experience”. According to her, their office designs buildings from the inside out, meaning that their design process always starts with the experience or feeling of an imagined person in an imagined space. Because of this, atmosphere could be said to be a “generator of what [the architects] do.”

Williams understands atmosphere in a different manner, as he associates the term with “spirit.” When a building is designed and built “through love,” a spirit emerges out of the process. One cannot “wield [the phenomenon] into a project,” as Atmosphere is a “part of the process of building coming to life”. It also stems from the spirit of a person experiencing the building: atmosphere has to do with “the inner light or the inner life” — a dialogue between the building and the person inside it. It is not possible to explain what the spirit of a building is, if there is no one inside it. The spiritual force attached to a building is activated by a person coming inside it. Williams says atmosphere is “completely allusive”.

**2. How would you define atmosphere?**

Tsien thinks that both architects have a similar definition of atmosphere but they approach the subject from different directions. She believes that the experience one feels within a building comes “from outside the person into the person” within the building. Trying to clarify and summarize what Williams previously said,



Tsien remarks that his view is that atmosphere is something that a person within a building projects from themselves. This, in turn, leads to the development of the spirit of the building.

### **3. How would you describe the role of atmosphere in buildings during the design process?**

Williams says that atmosphere can be likened to “breathing in and breathing out,” and that this idea also applies to the phenomenon’s role in the architectural design process. He believes that in order to “achieve a sense of spirit within the building,” the architect has to be “vulnerable” to listening to the client, the site, the people, the builder and his co-workers. It is in this vulnerability that a dialogue is born, and the architect starts to say “something declarative” about what the design should be.

Tsien agrees that the metaphor of breathing in and breathing out is correct. The architect is listening to all the sources that are telling him or her what the project could be. When they then breathe out, they start to formulate what their response is to what they breathed in.

Williams continues with the same metaphor, and says that the breathing is not always even: it is sometimes “very passionate and sometimes you are gasping for air.” He states that the design process should, in fact, have “crescendo, (...) argument, and (...) life” to it, in order for the result to have spirit. He can be angry at himself or others during the design process in his drive to understand. He also says that he feels a “strong noise that could come” from the building, the construction or the material in his design process, and that this seems like a powerful dialogue. The “heat” of the design process can thus be associated with people or inanimate entities, imagined or real. Williams presents an example: in the design process, the remark of another person concerning

the building being designed can feel like “a knife is being thrust into you” or “a gentle caress,” and in the case of the former, the architect has to either “extract it with blood” or to “ignore it and go on.”

### **4. How does the perception of the intuited atmosphere affect your mood during the design process? Does this have implications for the design process itself?**

Williams says that his mood “absolutely” changes because of the design process but that he cannot “intuit a spirit” and because of this cannot claim the atmosphere as the cause of this. However, he does believe that one has to “trust the spirit will be there through the process.” He does not intuit the future but instead attempts to stay in the present as “the present is the process,” even though he also admits that he of course thinks whether the building will work and what it will feel like to the person using it. Williams also remarks that he does not spend time thinking about how people will perceive the building, as the building “has life” within it during “the process”.

Tsien continues by saying that both architects name their goal in the design process, for example the creation of a sacred space, but then try not to focus on the exact words — they create an objective but then attempt to let go of it. The architects then rely on their design decisions to subconsciously lead them to the goal in question, rather than mapping out a strategy to it.

Williams agrees with Tsien, saying that “the spirit cannot be premeditated.” The spirit is the result of a process of “care and love and passion and commitment” — a sort of “gift.” Any premeditated atmosphere will almost always be “cheap.” According to Williams, atmosphere cannot be designed but arises out of the design and building process, noting that the work of masons,



plumbers and architects must be motivated by the love of the work. An architect can sometimes be the conductor, a musician or a simple aid in the process that the building arises from.

#### **5. How do your client's wishes affect the design process?**

Tsien says that the client's wishes are the basis of the design process. Both architects strive to answer them but to also "go beyond the immediate response" and to give the client a "new set of solutions that they never imagined." Williams adds to this that it is ideal, if the client can give the architects direction but to also be open for positive surprises — both the architects and the client "must be vulnerable to [their] preconceptions and to letting them disappear through the process."

Williams continues by stating, that sometimes during the design process, it is important to return to the most practical requirements posed by the client. He uses the example of a closet to hang clothes in, and says that the architects solution may have already transcended the needs of the client but there might be "no truth to it." Sometimes design problems become more primary instead of ever more sophisticated, and an architect may have to look for answers in their own childhood.

#### **6. How does the projected beholder of the building affect the design process?**

Williams says that there are multiple beholders that he thinks of during the design process. As an example he points to the fact that he is taller and heavier than Tsien, so if he were to design a building for her, he would imagine himself "in her shoes" and try to understand the world from her perspective. He continues that that however would not be sufficient — as a designer he would

put himself in the shoes of other potential beholders as well. The fact that there is not a single person, who could actually own the building is key to it having a spirit, as "the building exists by itself." Tsien agrees with Williams' explanation.

#### **7. How does the building and its unfolding design affect the design process?**

Tsien thinks that the unfolding design of a building can be likened to a life: it appears to be linear but the being living it can sometimes be in the past or the future. They remember the past or imagine themselves in the future. The design process for her is similar, in that it is about going forwards and backwards and accepting this oscillation.

Williams points out that their design process starts out with a thought, which is "less than an idea." This thought can become an idea, which in turn can become a space. The architects try to keep track of it as it "moves forward in time and space" but in the end it has a mind of its own — it can "refer back as much as it moves forward." There is a spirit in the design process. He says that one can either "stay in touch with the work" in order to stay connected to it, or to let it go. He likens the design to a personal relationship, in that people have to stay in tune with each other to maintain it. If a designer let's go of the design after the beginning, it will not have that much of their spirit in it. He questions whether the design is then that of the architect who started it.

#### **8. Which of these aspects (questions 5, 6, 7) do you find is the most important regarding their effect on the design process?**

For Tsien, question number one is actually the most important one: whether one is conscious of atmosphere in the design pro-



cess. According to her, atmosphere is not a consideration for some architects but for her and Williams, it is “maybe the most profound part of the design process.” While the practical constraints of a project are important, it is the unconstrained, the “experiential or spiritual aspect”, which is where she and Williams begin their design process. She sees that, at its core, a building is about “having that sense of experience to it” — “it’s about the person inside the room.” She further clarifies that atmosphere has more to do with the projected beholder’s experience than the spirit of the building.

Williams says that all three aspects are important. He feels that he must continuously “embed” himself in the client’s wishes, “inside the different users of the building,” the beholders of the building, and “the building itself,” in order for there to be “even the possibility of (...) a spirit of the building.” He gives the building his past, life, love, and commitment.

## **Interview with Juha Leiviskä**

4.4.2018 | *in-person at interviewee’s office* | *duration 53 minutes* | *Finnish, age 82*

### **1. Are you conscious of atmospheres in your design process?**

Leiviskä says that his design starts “from the atmosphere,” but that it is also his goal. A building’s atmosphere depends on the sensitivity of the architect – “the atmosphere is there or it is not.” Because of this requirement, it is possible for “an architecturally brilliant piece of work” to be dead. Leiviskä compares architecture to music, and says that an atmosphere-based interpretation is, in the end, the same as one arising from “theoretical or technical starting points.” Nevertheless, an analysis or characterization of a building can “kill the atmosphere.”

### **2. How would you define atmosphere?**

Leiviskä says that he does not want to define atmosphere but says that it comes from within and can be called background energy. He describes his design process as solitary — he must make “the basic solution” alone. He thanks his colleagues for their critical approach, as they can take his plan further by finding possible shortcomings. They understand the “aim of the atmosphere” as well as “the functional goal.”

### **3. How would you describe the role of atmosphere in buildings during the design process?**

The role of atmosphere is central during the design process, according to the interviewee. An architect should be fully able to “empathize with the possibilities of the place.” To take advantage



of the environment surrounding the building without harming it. When you maximally take advantage of the building's surroundings, you also end up preserving them — this “creates the atmosphere” of the building. During the design process, an architect creates something to add to the pre-existing atmosphere of a place. The completed structure will have its own atmosphere, which is derived from its surroundings. However, it must not “blend” with its surroundings but instead create “lively interaction” — together in harmony, yet still independent.

Leiviskä also says that the goal of the design process is to make the users happy, even when the builders place financial benefits as the ultimate goal. He presents an example of his project Kipparintalo in Kalasatama, in which he successfully fought to complete a solution preferred by the users.

#### **4. How does the perception of the intuited atmosphere affect your mood during the design process? Does this have implications for the design process itself?**

Leiviskä remarks that when he is “on the right track”, the atmosphere has an “uplifting effect.” Design work, along with all work, requires that you immerse yourself in it. “Sacrificing oneself” is required for the creation of atmosphere. Leiviskä goes on to explain that the creation of atmosphere as the end result of a design process is “not necessarily” affected by whether the design process is completed in a group or alone. He says that it is his weakness that he cannot think freely with others around him, as he finds it difficult to say no to anyone.

#### **5. How do your client's wishes affect the design process?**

Leiviskä says that the client's wishes “should affect” the design process as it is “a part of the job.” However, he believes that an architect should not do what the client “wants” but instead try to find out what the client “needs.” The interviewee describes this by presenting an example – an unbuilt house that he designed for a famous Finnish singer. He says that while they had certain specific requirements, he did not follow their stylistic wishes. He believed that the stylistic wishes would have “hardly” met their needs, and instead focused on designing a building that suited “[their] rhythm,” as that would have fulfilled their needs. Leiviskä described his design and remarked that, while he got “excited about the atmosphere” of his design, the client ended up turning it down. He explains that his client had the ability to make “good interpretations on the spiritual level,” but that their “general knowledge” wasn't very broad. Leiviskä further clarifies that “many musicians are interested in other forms of art,” including architecture, but this particular person “had not had time to delve into that,” — “a strong emotional approach to your art can make you blind, too.”

#### **6. How does the projected beholder of the building affect the design process?**

Leiviskä specifies that he in fact previously meant the beholder or user of a building, and not the client. He tells about his excursions with Nils-Erik Wikberg, and how he visited churches across Finland and Turkey. The experience that indirect light creates within these buildings is “immense.” It is something that cannot be drawn or calculated, one has to “become aware of the methods to create it.” The interviewee gives his churches, the Nakkila Par-



ish Centre and the St. Thomas Church in Oulu, as examples of buildings, which “work quite well in this regard.” He says that the users of the St. Thomas Church “were happy and satisfied,” – the building made them “love themselves and be happy.” This went against the wishes of a “very conservative” parish vicar, who was however not able to change the space despite trying.

Leiviskä remarks that he prefers to use the “color scale of the material” when working with wood or brick but keeps his rooms mostly white to make use of “the light that we have here in the North.” Because of this, often only the artwork in his spaces have different colors in them. He continues by remarking that he has used wooden interiors for many private houses. Two such houses of his however, have concrete interiors, though they have been painted white. Wood is, according to the interviewee, stronger than concrete “when it comes to atmosphere.”

## **7. How does the building and its unfolding design affect the design process?**

Leiviskä presents the Helsinki contemporary art museum competition as an example of a project, where he got the idea for his proposal immediately: he believed that the site was chosen poorly as the cityscape was supposed to open towards the Töölönlahti bay. Because of this, he placed his design on the level of the bay and left the street level largely empty. He says that the design idea usually “comes to [him] quite quickly,” although taking into account the “multifarious” “starting points and properties” of the design requires “some exercising.” While the design starts to “live” right away, it is “important to not fall in love with it immediately.” one must keep a level head concerning the plan, so that “when there is a knot, you do not split it in the middle with a sword, instead you [unravel] it slowly.”



St. Thomas Church in Oulu



**8. Which of these aspects (questions 5, 6, 7) do you find is the most important regarding their effect on the design process?**

The beholder is the most important aspect in the design process, according to the interviewee. This can sometimes also mean the client. If a client turns down a proposal by Leiviskä, and If the client is very persistent and wants him to still design afterwards, he must simply accept that his proposal, “the only possible solution,” has been rejected and start again. He would then begin again by empathizing with the beholder, although he admits that this kind of a situation is “a bit theoretical,” because he has not been “in such a situation.” At the stage when the client must make a decision whether to accept his proposal, they have usually already “reached an understanding” together. His realized projects “have been the right solutions in [his] opinion.”

**Interview with Adam Caruso**

*20.4.2018 | live interview via internet audio call | duration 49 minutes | Swiss (Canadian), age 56*

**1. Are you conscious of atmospheres in your design process?**

Caruso states that he is. Atmosphere is more often discussed as a quality of the interior of buildings because it is “more easily defined as a designer atmosphere.” This is due to the greater control that the designer has inside a building without weather and with greater awareness of the people inside it. Nevertheless, “buildings do have atmosphere,” although the interviewee would “use the word character more often.” Caruso mentions that in the German-speaking world the discussion about atmosphere is connected to empathy and took largely place in the early 20th century, under the term “Stimmung”. In the Italian-speaking world the term is “ambiente”. In Finland the discussion seems to be connected to phenomenology, as evidenced by the questions of this study.

**2. How would you define atmosphere?**

Caruso says that he likens buildings to people when speaking about character. As an example he mentions the bank in Bremen that his office completed: it was relevant for the structure to be more formal. The building “should not be too flashy [and] the people who use [it] should feel that (...) their money is safe there.” Such things were discussed in the 19th century, for example in the writings of Adolf Loos. The subject was not phenomenological, as Loos talked about “propriety and what is appropriate or relevant.”

Caruso explains that atmosphere “is the main thing that ar-



chitecture can do.” The phenomenological view is connected to culture as well, because it arose after the Second World War together with the interest in “perception and the senses.” Caruso mentions Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty but further states that “when architects use those guys they simplify them too much (...)” According to him, atmosphere is sometimes about deciding “what you are going to wear” and being appropriate. Admitting that he is “interested in custom,” he continues by remarking that architecture has “all of these things that have to do with culture.” The discourse about appropriateness and the “debates about style” from the 19th century are connected to this.

Caruso also explains that “of course”, he is also interested in how a building can have an “immediate physical and emotional effect on you.” He is also interested in contemporary art, because of its power and “how it affects you.” Sometimes the understanding of that effect is lost on the viewer but still felt – something that Caruso values.

The interviewee talks about Finland’s capital: its neo-classical and neo-romanesque architecture, and how the city meets the sea and the woods. Atmosphere in a city is a combination of weather, available building materials, culture, custom and appropriateness, which encompass the interests Caruso mentioned previously. He concludes with his belief that the “post-war period phenomenology” is a way for a modern architect to talk about “meaning”, without “having to talk about some of those difficult things, [that] are clearly historical.” He links this to Heidegger, “a nazi sympathizer,” who gave the keynote at the “Darmstadt talks” in the 50s. The lecture “was very influential,” and stated how cities in Germany “should” be built.

### **3. How would you describe the role of atmosphere in buildings during the design process?**

Atmosphere, or character, is “the primary thing” for Caruso: what the building “feels and looks like.” “The things that generate” this quality are the look of the facades and the internal elevations of the rooms, along with the temperature and the smell. The look of a facade has the capacity to make the designer recall other things, that they have seen before. These “connections” are something that Caruso also uses in his teaching to help students “imagine [their] project – – more clearly.” They are a way for the interviewee to legitimize, explain or communicate what he is doing in his design process. For Caruso, the more technical elements of architecture, such as the length of the down pipe, also serve the same purpose – the “formation of character.”

Whereas the design of a house on a remote building site, for example “the woods,” can have more to do with “your body and relation to the body of the building,” in the city the facades of a building “become more important,” due to the fact that one can see them from “a distance or (...) close-up.” This relationship to buildings in a city is “highly culturalized” and parallels “clothing,” according to Caruso. He continues by stating that “this analogy of clothing” comes from Adolf Loos, who was referring to Gottfried Semper and his term “Bekleidung.” With this, Semper meant that the meaning of a building is not communicated by its “literal structure” but “the way the architect dresses the structure.” “Architecture is different than structure, [das] Tagwerk.” Caruso further clarifies this with a comparison to the “bones and the skin” of a person: the outer layer of a person is what communicates most about them, and they are not known by their skeleton.

### **4. How does the perception of the intuited atmosphere affect your mood during the design process? Does this have implications for the design process itself?**



Atmosphere affects Caruso's mood "when the design is going bad." Although he also remarks that "it is more the other way around." He gives an example of his design process, and says that as he is designing a room, he tries to think about rooms that he has been in that would have an atmosphere that would be "relevant" to the place he is currently designing. This atmosphere is then used as "a measure," and the atmosphere of the new design is compared to it. "The huge inventive potential" of this architectural approach is in its capacity to function regardless of whether the two rooms are "programmatically" similar or not. Comparing the atmospheres of the rooms, for example based on a model of the new space, Caruso may find that the new design has "nothing to do" with the atmosphere that it was measured to. However, this may lead to "something else, which is really interesting" in terms of atmosphere.

The interviewee continues by saying that he does not consider his mood as an aspect that has a great effect on the design since the process is long and the architect need to "be open" — "your mood will change the next day." He says however that when he is depressed it is not possible to "do very much" work. At those points one should "just do some administration." Caruso admits that "getting lost at [his design work]" does affect him.

## **5. How do your client's wishes affect the design process?**

Going back to his architectural approach, Caruso says that it is discursive and allows for the "ambitions that the client has" to be taken into account. He explains how he may talk or not talk about the underlying motivations that a client has driving their wants upon becoming aware of their existence: whether to question a client if they ask for a "pompous" room for example.

These ambitions are "more immediate" with "house clients," and according to Caruso, "an architect has a real responsibility to understand what the client wants their building to be like." This, "of course," does not mean what the building "looks like." As an example, he explains the design brief his client gave him when he designed the Brick House, a project in England. The clients had had a "clear organizational wish," which was also an "atmospheric wish." They had not however specified the building material as brick, and "were rather shocked" when the architects came up with the idea to make the building completely out of that material. Caruso commends the clients for their courage and intellect for understanding why the material was proposed, and says that what they had told the architects "at the beginning" had made the designers think of creating a "very insulated kind of deep, deep house."

The interviewee continues by telling about a bank building his office completed in Bremen, Germany. He talks about how the design of the building emerged from his reading of the building site, the surrounding city and its history, further elaborating that this process is "completely" intuitive. In his experience, an architect "should have a very elevated sensitivity to those cues, from the site, from the client," concluding that the "sensitivity" of the human "senses" enable this.

Caruso states that he strongly dislikes the idea that "the architect and the project (...) have a symmetrical relationship." He does not care if people know that his office has designed a certain building, because after it is finished it is "out there in the world," and "the clients have to look after it and hopefully inhabit it in a productive way." He continues by explaining his dislike for the idea of "the star architect" and that their project has a symmetrical relationship with them. According to Caruso, projects cannot repeat themselves if they have been designed to "what is specific





Brick House in London

about a situation.” Also, an architect should not work in places they do not know enough about. This is for example the reason why his office has not worked in China or the Middle East — Caruso would consider working in these countries “cultural imperialism.” Despite this, the interviewee admits, that the creation of brands in architecture “is a discourse now,” as well as “a way to be a successful architect.”

Caruso says that brand-driven architecture is a “perfect expression” of “the neo-liberal climate we have now.” Atmosphere and empathy are “so sensitive and weak, that the neo-liberal economy does not care about them (...)” However, they are also “resistant,” because they “connect to values or qualities, which are not very well described by neo-liberalism.” This is the reason, why one can “go back” and see these qualities in buildings “from today, from the 50s, from the 30s” as well as from the 20th and 19th centuries, which is “another thrilling thing about being an architect” — the ability to “connect across history,” because of your “interest,” “knowledge” and “sensitivity.” This is a “privilege” to Caruso, and something that “you have to look after (...)”

## 6. How does the projected beholder of the building affect the design process?

For Caruso, the client is the primary concern here, as they are “the person who has to suffer the building the most.” Caruso goes back to his earlier statement about the value of “good clients” and their “ambition,” saying that neo-liberalism has also reduced their amount — many clients are abstract entities, for example funds. He talks about how their clients in three different projects were each good in their own right. The first of these is a housing and office building in Zürich that was commissioned by SBB Immobilien, which had an “articulate” director, who “improved the





Nottingham Contemporary in Nottingham

project,” despite the company being “a completely anonymous, impersonal entity.” The second example is the Brick House, which Caruso spoke about already before. The project had an “architecturally literate client,” who followed the architects wishes on “fundamentally important things,” despite sometimes not understanding them. The third project is the Tate Modern’s master plan, extension and the refurbishment of existing property, where the client was similar to the commissioners of the Brick House. Caruso explains that the clients are often “shocked” as designs become more concrete but also that “part of being a good client is that they are quite fearless.”

The interviewee says that his office “really” tries to “control everything” in their designs but also, that “there are always things that you never knew were in the project.” This is “part of the design process, part of the intention” — a “feedback loop when the building becomes a reality” — as the “object surprises” the “author.” Caruso clarifies this by talking about the opening of the Nottingham Contemporary Arts museum, which his office designed: the clients used a “big room” for a “mega-education artist event,” and while doing so discovered that the space had a “school gymnasium”-like quality. At first Caruso had been “a bit shocked” but then realized that “this is amazing.” This is something that “makes architecture (...) worth it,” according to him — something to motivate the architect through “the torture” of building. Caruso likens this to how a building can “become something else” sometimes when the weather changes. An architect knows the necessary information in order to see a building built — “like a fiction that you create in order to make the design” — but after its completion time passes and things that were unknown to the architect emerge, as they “are not involved in the process of developing the design.” Concerning this, the interviewee re-emphasizes his earlier statement about authorship in architecture.



Caruso elaborates further on the question by talking about his exhibition at the 2018 Venice Biennale, which “is only about elevations.” The aim is to highlight the importance of facades, as they define “the public spaces” of cities. After all, while the client is “the most implicated person after the architect,” “99,9 percent of the people who will experience the building (...) will have nothing to do with the design process.” Caruso explains that for example their office attempted to implicate the passers-by in their design of the Nottingham Contemporary Museum by having “big windows,” which one could peer through to see the galleries and maybe “build up the courage and go in.” The person who walks by the building is also “important,” as they “either suffer or get great pleasure from (...) the building maybe every day.” The beholder “is many different people” now but also across time, since there will be “another generation” after the “original” one dies according to Caruso.

Another design audience is “our peers,” who come to see interviewee’s work “when you finish a good building.” Caruso says that in Switzerland these occasions are marked by an *Apéro* party, during which some colleagues comment on the project while others later send criticism by email. This “does matter” to Caruso, as “the immediate discourse” and architectural writing is something that he encourages.

### **7. How does the building and its unfolding design affect the design process?**

Caruso says that the design process is a constant “feedback cycle,” where the building “completely takes on a life of its own.” He goes on to explain how he and his partner, Peter St John, design buildings. In the beginning of their career, they would talk extensively to understand “what the concept for the building was.”

This concept would then be “developed” further, while at times comparing the unfolding design to the original concept, that could have been “formal” or “conceptual” in nature. Nowadays the duo’s designs start “with a very ill-defined and ill-understood series of ideas for a building,” which could be “based on images” or not. Sometimes the designs are “quite abstract” and “a concept” might arise “at the end” of the process. Some of the projects “use references in a very clear way,” although the references themselves can function in different ways – either as “conceptual” or “formal instruments.” Caruso says that the design process is “this folding - unfolding thing.”

### **8. Which of these aspects (questions 5, 6, 7) do you find is the most important regarding their effect on the design process?**

According to the interviewee, the most important aspect of the design process is that the designers think “about architecture as a spatial and experiential thing,” which is “not abstract” but “a concrete thing.” It is key that the attempted end result is something “concrete,” and thus the designer should think about the design “in relation to the experiences” they have had. As the design unfolds, these “qualities” are then used as “instruments.”

To Caruso, “the client is very important but architecture is more important.” He finds “interesting,” how different people “are implicated in the building” but admits that he also does not “think about them so much” in the design process. He explains that for example a public building’s “consultation process” has to be “very very carefully managed,” as it is impossible to “make a building that represents what everybody wants.” The discursive aspect the people implicated in the project create should arise out of the completed architecture — not the other way around — as “the architecture comes out of architecture.”



## Pre-interview with Johan Celsing

6.5.2018 | live interview via internet video call | duration 48 minutes | Swedish, age 63

*The interview was meant to take place on this date but the interviewee did not have enough time to do it. The session instead turned into a discussion about his design philosophy. Celsing was also able to go through the questions with the interviewer, and get information about who was going to ask him questions.*

After asking questions about the interviewer's academic background, Celsing explained his concern regarding his interview answers — mainly that he believes they would not directly answer the questions asked from him. Nevertheless, he comments that the interview questions are “very relevant” and that “he can relate to these things very much,” saying that he would give “certain comments on these things.” He compares himself to other architects, who may be more “interested in the technical aspect” or “urbanistic issues,” and states that “empathy and atmosphere” are topics, which he can relate to “maybe more than” other colleagues.

Celsing finds out that the questions have been sent out to “several people,” and upon questioning whether he could have thus also answered with a written response, is given the reasoning for live interviews; the attempt is to “get closer to the subconscious (...)” Upon hearing this, Celsing claims that the interviewer “would need an introduction to how [he looks at] his work,” before he answers the interview questions.

Thus he begins telling about his design approach by explaining how he values the topics of the study. The interviewee believes that “without empathy architecture can be like a monster”: utilizing the knowledge architects possess on “technical” and “formal”

solutions “is really a risky business,” as architecture “affects people so much.” In addition, the atmospheres that “buildings create are extremely important,” because buildings are designed for people to be in or around.”

Celsing remarks that “many things that [he thinks] are really important” cannot be approached directly — such as “beauty.” In order to arrive at such a goal one has “to make (...) a detour,” as what is beautiful “is dependent on the attitude of your works: it could be “very rough or very fragmented” in one project or “very clear or very elegant” “in another project by the same architect.” Celsing says that with his architecture, “the underlying attitude (...) is seen in the beauty or atmosphere” of the buildings. Instead of a unifying formal language, the common element in his projects is his “view on the role of [himself] (...) as an architect” — the buildings are “fragments” of his “attitude.” The interviewee reiterates his earlier comment on “empathy” and how it is important in order for the “extremely rich nuances,” that his detailing, or “formal games,” can create. The same is true for technical or programmatic solutions, which can fulfill “the brief” but result in a building devoid of “atmosphere and empathy” something that “is not so infrequent in architecture.”

Celsing continues by highlighting a “really important” quote from Leon Battista Alberti: “the highest virtue in the art of building is to know what is appropriate.” According to the interviewee, this relates directly to Aristotle, and his concept of “decorum” — “what is fitting, what is appropriate” — in conjunction with Greek theatre: one was not to “use the words of the comedy in a tragedy” or vice versa, because it could have “blurred the strength of the presentation.” This “also had to do with” Aristotle's cardinal virtues — for example “moderation,” “courage and wisdom” — which are still relevant today according to Celsing. Aristotle used these to define “decorum,” as an attempt to balance “between



(...) two extremes”: for example, “generosity” could mean being “tight-fisted” with money or being a “big spender,” depending on the situation. To the interviewee, this appropriateness is connected to “empathy,” as he attempts to balance project spending, or make a “facade system (...) perfect for a certain client or for a certain situation.” Continuing on empathy, he says that he looks upon it “as more of a human sensibility” or “moral,” and states that “finding a balance in what is appropriate in every situation is (...) a very important part in our work,”

Celsing says that he is “not so interested in” trying to give direct answers, as he personally prefers “giving you back the question.” Appropriateness demands attentiveness and scholarship so that one might “understand the situation,” which equates to there being “no definite answers to things.” Once again referring to Aristotle, the interviewee presents the philosopher’s example of appropriate conduct in a court of law, and quotes that “the good judge should be like the masons at Lesbos.” The masons of the island had lead “canons” as rulers, which would bend “to fit” different situations. Thus “the good judge” should look at what the circumstances of the crime were before passing judgement — “to interpret the situation.”

This kind of thinking has “influenced” Celsing’s view of his profession, as he has to “very often” compare his design solutions to what he believes to be “moral” or “appropriate.” This creates a “paradox,” something that he has described as a “double imperative” in his lectures. For example, when a design runs into programmatic issues and its “wonderful facade” has to be altered, necessitating that “the form cannot be as pretty as you wanted.” In situations like this “the functional requirement somehow makes the form even more beautiful, because it gives it some urgency,” according to Celsing, “and on the other hand (...) the form sometimes solves functional requirements.” Thus one cannot ask

the architect for something “very beautiful” or something with “lovely atmosphere” — the design aspects are all connected. In Celsing’s mind, one can only work “insistently” “towards a goal” while being “open to these paradoxes.”

Declaring that “there [are] never any rulebooks that you can completely follow,” the interviewee states that an architect has to be “sensitive.” “By having (...) strong empathy,” one can choose the formal, technical and economic solutions, which best serve the “people who are going [to] live in the building.” Celsing notes that his essay “Plan’s meters” goes in depth with his belief that a meter is not just a measurement but “a formal device.” A meter in a plan can be likened to “the metrical rule of a poem,” which creates a regulating rhythm, essential for the poem to be “beautiful.” Similarly, the meters in a floor plan create “an underlying grid” with a rhythm, that affects people even though they may not notice it. This idea, together with empathy, form “a pair of two issues” that Celsing thinks of “constantly.”

Celsing says that answering questions about atmosphere’s effect on his design work is “very complex,” as he considers it “intuitive.” However, he says that while “every building has atmosphere,” what is “interesting” is to think of an “appropriate atmosphere” for a project. While the client and owner of the building affect this, Celsing tries to make his buildings “appropriate” for more than “a single use” — for the solution to not be “too strong” but to instead “have a certain generosity.” He attempts to have his clients accept “less exclusive looking, but more lasting” projects, and prefers his designs “to have a very very long” life span, even though he gets frequently asked to design expensive-looking but cheap buildings.



## Interview with Johan Celsing

9.5.2018 | live interview via internet video call | duration 50 minutes | Swedish, age 63

### 1. Are you conscious of atmospheres in your design process?

Celsing says that he is conscious of atmospheres in his design process.

### 2. How would you define atmosphere?

Atmosphere is “of extraordinary importance but seemingly without substance.” Celsing believes that the air on Earth has physical characteristics, which differentiate the phenomenon here from what it would for example be on Mars, and thus a planet’s physical atmosphere has an effect on atmosphere in architecture. Although atmosphere has “a physical substance,” it is “hidden” and cannot be touched. He calls atmosphere with the historical term “Stimmung” used in German, and recalls its Swedish translation, “Stämning.” He explains that the phenomenon is created by “arrangements that create a certain character,” and while these are not “over evident,” they are usually “numerous”: these can be “subtle surfaces, (...) lights, or air,” and how “they influence our perception of a space.” Celsing further clarifies his definition of the phenomenon by elaborating that atmosphere “is seemingly without substance but (...) greatly affects our perception.”

### 3. How would you describe the role of atmosphere in buildings during the design process?

The role of atmosphere in Celsing’s projects is “very strong” even though the interviewee considers it to just be one of many factors

that influence the design process. These include “logistics or technical efficiency,” “durability,” “economics of space,” and “a beautiful layer or efficient planning.” The complexity of uniting all of these factors is what is the “interesting thing about architecture” and something that makes it “sort of an old man’s profession.” Celsing says that atmosphere is “one of the many factors with which” he considers “every solution.”

He does not consider that these factors have any explicit hierarchy but admits that one can emerge among them depending on the project in question. According to him “atmosphere does not happen if you cannot afford to build it,” and projects where factors other than atmosphere create this kind of a situation, show that an underlying hierarchy can arise. Celsing states that he does not “look upon these factors in a hierarchical sense,” explaining that he is “reluctant (...) to have (...) rules, that you can learn by the book,” because he thinks that it is necessary to “engage with each situation” separately due to the unique responses they constitute.

### 4. How does the perception of the intuited atmosphere affect your mood during the design process? Does this have implications for the design process itself?

Celsing considers the question “unexpected.” He explains that the design processes take many years, sometimes stopping and again starting as project schedules are settled on. Despite this, he admits that there is “sometimes (...) definitely a kind of joy” when he finds “shapes or spaces that are fascinating,” although this excitement does not mean that the solutions are “the best.” The interviewee also says that at other situations he can be “pretty tense” and think that the design does not “work out.” The atmosphere is “always part of” this but it is still only one of many such cri-



teria, with which he considers his work. He presents an example about “doing a boiler room,” and says that imagining an atmosphere “wonderful for an art gallery” can be exciting but that it is not “appropriate” for the given situation. Even when designing a “private house,” atmosphere cannot be focused on alone, even when “you think that looks very cool,” as other practical aspects influence it. Because of the number of considerations, Celsing concludes that he does “not really know what to say about” atmosphere’s effect on his mood.

Celsing thinks that he cannot say, whether shifts in his mood affect his designs but admits that “that probably happens.” He says that “mood is not the best evaluator of the work.” He considers the design process “intriguing,” and says that it is “magic.” He “strives” to be “organized and sort of efficient,” and says that he does not do this “for its own sake,” as according to the interviewee, “rhythm is good (...) in a piece of architecture.” Celsing says that his work aims to be “structured,” because he thinks that it creates the possibility for “nuances” to appear and “become of interest.”

### **5. How do your client’s wishes affect the design process?**

Celsing answers that the client’s wishes affect his work “very, very much.” He explains that he does “a lot of” competitions, and in those the client’s wishes take the form of “the program.” As the wishes are what “unites all the schemes” in a competition, the interviewee believes that they are “of utmost importance.” However, he also feels that the client only provides “the starting point,” and compares the act of designing to a “game of chess”: despite having firm rules, one can play in a myriad of ways within their confines. He tries to “tailor” the design “perfectly for [the client] but also perfectly for [himself],” and “transcend” the design brief

by proposing things the clients “never asked for” but upon seeing them realize that “yes of course” they are a positive addition. Celsing thinks that this “independence” is “interesting,” and calls his approach to the client’s wishes “functionalistic.” The way in which the design work and the wishes “merge” creates “this interesting combination.”

### **6. How does the projected beholder of the building affect the design process?**

The interviewee says that he “does not think of the beholder of the building in the future” but does have a wish for how his houses “could be perceived.” He explains that he may for example want the design to either “merge” with its surroundings, so that “you do not differentiate the building from the others,” or “step forward,” so that it is “easy to reach” or that one can see “where [it] is.” Celsing says that this is “an abstraction of the view of the beholder.”

Celsing hopes that his buildings “may engage with people in a way which [they] did not expect.” He tells how his Nobel Forum building masks laboratories behind “basic” windows, so that a passer-by might not be able to differentiate the building from others around it as one containing such spaces, but if they happen to “stay there a little longer” they may notice the purpose of the building. The building “may give you an intriguing hint that it is not what you first thought.” Celsing says that he considers this “interesting in architecture,” and continues by stating that his aim in many of his buildings is to imbue them with “an intention (...) that you could explore it,” describing them as “understated” and “low key.”

The interviewee talks about another one of his buildings as an example of his design approach, first describing the architectural



trend of shifting facade windows sideways in a varied pattern in order to avoid “being dull.” Celsing thinks that this trend is “exploited” in an “unnecessary way,” as the buildings adorned with such facades, “make a lot of fuss” even though they have “nothing to say.” His example is a tower in Malmö, where he has attempted to create facades, which “look repetitive” but are actually not: the base and top of the building have rows of windows with measurements different from the rest. The purpose of having the “nuances inside of [the] pattern,” is to make the “beholder (...) sense a greater ease” and “feel better,” as without them the facades would be “dull.” Celsing compares his treatment of the facade to human speech, explaining that when speaking, the different tonal shifts are “very particular,” and that the caesura in poems has a similar quality: the pauses seem vague but come “very naturally,” and “heightens certain things and separates” others. This is also his aim in his design work, to imbue them with “nuances” that make them feel “more straight forward” but not “stiff” in the beholder’s experience. Celsing elaborates this yet further by noting the similarities of his approach to Greek architecture by pointing out the shifting measurements and angles of the Parthenon pillars. The interviewee thinks that this approach is present in music as well: when people hear the work of conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen, “he has a certain idea about the beholder” and thus presents the music to them in a way, which takes into account their perception.

## **7. How does the building and its unfolding design affect the design process?**

While Celsing would not say that a building “takes a life of its own,” he does think that a design “takes on (...) a certain character” “quite early” in the design process. The design starts to tell him whether what he adds or adjusts “fits or does not” fit.



Brick Tower in Malmö



He compares this to composing a piece of music: the key one chooses in the beginning of composing, means that shifting to another key midway through the piece feels “alien,” and in order to change the piece in this way, one would have to change “the whole piece.” The interviewee says that he can see this happening when assistants offer design solutions, which “may be great technically”, but still do not fit the project, as it has already taken on “a certain character,” and “says yes and no to different solutions.” At this point, Celsing’s role becomes that of “a conductor,” as he “keeps [the design’s] direction” the same.

Celsing says that this underlying feeling of character is “pretty subtle” but that for him, and his “most knowledgeable colleagues or assistants, it is also quite clear.” He says that understanding what the building has to “say” is “pretty intuitive.” Even when a design solution does not “fit,” this can “also be very interesting,” as the “clash” can lead to design alterations great or small, if the new solution is “important.”

**8. Which of these aspects (questions 5, 6, 7) do you find is the most important regarding their effect on the design process?**

Despite the subtleties of his design approach, Celsing tries to be “sort of basic,” and says that the client has the most important influence on the design process. He explains that the client’s importance is due to their wish being “the starting point,” and also due to the nature of the profession: as an “applied art,” “buildings are made for people.” The interviewee believes that even if the client “is an idiot,” “you lose something” without them, because the “work is so dependent” on being “an interesting fusion of issues.” While the “patterns” and the poetic “rhythm” are “extremely important,” something is lost “without the sentiment of a person.” Celsing also considers “the beholder” more connected to

“the architects view” and to how he wants the building “to be,” so views it as something “intellectual.” He continues by stating that even though “atmosphere” is “kind of a formal issue,” it is “very important as they are real people who are using the building.” He states that the client’s importance “must always be stressed” because otherwise there is a risk that “high-brow intellectuals or high-brow (...) artists or architects (...) forget this very serious and helpful instance.” However, Celsing alludes that this hierarchy of importance may be different when “clients (...) are (...) developers who just want to get a lot of money and (...) build [the building] very cheaply (...),” but does not go into this as “that is another story.”



## Interview with Rick Joy

19.5.2018 | *live interview via internet video call* | duration 44 minutes | *Swedish, age 60*

### 1. Are you conscious of atmospheres in your design process?

Joy says that he is conscious of atmospheres during the design process.

### 2. How would you define atmosphere?

Atmosphere is the quality of the emotional spirit of a room or a place, according to Joy. He points out that he defines it “differently every time.” In his written answer he defined the phenomenon as “the present ambiance, mood, tone and character of one’s experiences in a place or space.” He says that these “qualities” go “sometimes” without notice, and clarifies that, even though his written answer might seem to make atmosphere solely linked to the beholder’s experience, the phenomenon “always has something to do with place.”

In Joy’s opinion, atmosphere “has to do with (...) mostly light,” but also with “color.” To further explain this, he notes that the atmosphere in Helsinki is “quite different” when compared to what it is in Tucson, Arizona. This is because of “light and moisture”: “the sunlight in Helsinki is hitting more water molecules in the air than here in Tucson.” The light in Tucson is “very bright and brilliant,” because it is “hitting dust.”

### 3. How would you describe the role of atmosphere in buildings during the design process?

Joy’s written answer to the question also explains his design methodology:

“In the designs, a great deal of attention is given to the qualities of the sensual experiences. After achieving a thorough understanding of the owner’s aspirations and the required functional aspects, I frequently enter into a realm of mindfulness that relies predominantly on intuition. This realm allows for a synthesis of the logical aspects of the design and a visceral understanding of the experiences – transcending the theoretical. This process is important to the overall development of ideas to such a great extent that it often preempts my consideration of the visual form. The more ethereal aspects of the intimate experiences - the sounds, smells, tactile qualities and moods are often more important than the object itself. The act of seeing through the window or entering the door is considered first. An architecture develops that, in its deliberate simplicity, gently nudges people on to a more engaging multi-sensory experience and heightens the awareness of actually being there.”

In the live interview he further clarifies the nature of his “realm of mindfulness” by explaining what he imagined while creating the entrance to his office. He presents a series of sensory details: the gate to the front yard “purposely” “squeaks” when opened, one has “to duck a little bit” because of the tree “curving into the pathway,” its shadows “lacy,” the gravel crunches “under your feet” as “the water” trickles in the pool placed in the front yard. According to Joy, his “goal is always to try to develop a method for sensory tuning to occur,” and he believes that his office entrance “wakens you up,” as was his “goal.”

Joy says that he has “always (...) naturally thought about atmosphere” because he was a musician. As a drummer he learned that the “emotional atmosphere” of a song is “driven by the rhythms.”





Rick Joy's Office Entrance in Tuscon

The interviewee found that this knowledge “just flowed into [his thinking] in architecture.” He had to “set a tone and an atmosphere for the song” with “the groove,” “and then choose when to have space.” Joy notes that “when you listen to Miles Davis, it is the space between the notes that [is] more profound” rather than “when he blows.” He points out that being a musician was “a big part of [his] life,” as he was “almost 30” when he went “to school.”

At the start of his career, he was “more or less by [himself]” and did a lot of “dream work” while designing, meaning that he was “just dreaming about what [the design] could be.” Joy explains that, as his office now includes 35 people, he can no longer afford to work like he used to. He instead sits beside an employee, while “narrating experience and atmosphere, and what [they] want to achieve.” He calls this phase “the what if-phase,” and says that it is “pretty effective,” “enriching” and “even more fun for [him] than his old method.”

This phase is “most fun in the atmosphere considerations” but also when Joy is investigating the “quality of experience and [the] relationship to place.” He says that though he works with “building culture,” “the atmosphere of the place is where (...) you can begin to identify with the place without being identical to all the other buildings.” Joy points out that this process is a “dialogue,” where he “throws out first hints at where to go,” but also wants “everybody to learn about design and how I think,” so that they can “support the whole thing.” He especially enjoys when his employees catch him contradicting himself in his narration of atmosphere.

He talks about two of his projects that are situated near each other but still possess a different “quality.” The first one, “the desert nomad house,” consists of “three little tubes,” which each of them “a very specific instrument that frames a particular light show view of the desert.” The structures take the form of “box-



es with air and light underneath,” clad with “heavy plate steel.” Between them are specifically designed microclimates, similar to “what farmers do between their barns.” Joy describes the maple-clad interior of the boxes as having a “jewelry box kind of feel,” with materials and details chosen to “support the concept very directly,” as is the case with the rest of the project. He states that his design “worked” and the atmosphere is “amazing” as the sun rises and “the shades come down”, explaining that “it is like being in the gossamer wing.” The second project that Joy mentions is a house “only 500 yards away” from his office but made to be “completely different.” Joy describes the building as “rammed earth rigid on the ground with a big [vessel] to collect water.” The building became so different because its site is “wide in the open,” and thus Joy “did not see the same quality” that he did in the earlier house.

#### **4. How does the perception of the intuited atmosphere affect your mood during the design process? Does this have implications for the design process itself?**

Joy says that one has to “work well within an atmospheric thought, (...) pretend that you are in it, or actually get in it, in the emotional state that you are striving for.” The interviewee calls this as “an emotional dialogue” and says that “it works the same as when you turn off all the lights at home when you want to go to sleep,” with the result “that you just start falling asleep.” The connection between Joy’s emotions and the atmosphere he is imagining is “pretty direct.” He explains that his design approach is “evolving as [he] gets older,” because he trusts himself “a lot more now,” but that even in his first project, the room he is in while taking part in the interview, he knew where and how the light would have to come in to create the desired atmosphere.

#### **5. How do your client’s wishes affect the design process?**

The interviewee says that the client’s wishes do affect his design process. He tells about a “project in the mountains,” where the clients “were kind of jerks,” and thus “the project turned out to be very sterile and dull” and “almost too perfect.” Joy explains that “planned imperfections,” something he discusses with Indian architect Bijoy Jain, are an essential part of his work, as “that is what makes it rich.” Without them, Joy feels that buildings “get the bad rep of (...) modern architecture.” In the project he mentioned, the clients rejected this approach, thinking that the building “should be perfect if [they] were paying that much,” and because of this “did not get [Joy’s] full dream work” like “all the other” clients had.

Joy describes atmosphere as “being a stimulating design process (...), and then also a great tool for working with people.” For example, the building he is in during the interview, served as “a teaching tool for my (...) client from Vancouver”: the client had wanted the architect to design “a fake historic building” but was convinced otherwise, because Joy was able to “talk about the atmospheric qualities and connection to place (...)” Joy is in a building in his office “campus,” which is designed differently from the buildings in its city block, creating “some amazing places” within it. Joy says to “just steer [clients] away from the conventional,” stating that the creation of houses for people is about “being conceptually insightful and giving.” Explaining that as Louis Khan had said, designing is “like giving breath,” where “you bring everything you know about yourself in the place (...) and try to find an even better way to live on the site.”



## **6. How does the projected beholder of the building affect the design process?**

Joy thinks that “the client is everybody.” In the Princeton train station project his office completed, Joy thought that the client was “all the students (...), the professors (...), the scientists (...), Einstein’s ghost and everything.” This is what the beholder means for the interviewee, and thus its effect for his design project is the same as that of the client.

Joy clarifies that he goes into the building being designed in his imagination, instead of placing himself in the client’s shoes, and implies that so do the 35 people in his office, who are “working on it.” He explains that, as there are 19 countries represented in his office and with both sexes represented equally, there “is a lot of cross-learning.”

## **7. How does the building and its unfolding design affect the design process?**

Joy presents an example of “the moment in design” that has the capacity to “drive a whole direction.” He was once working on a house, where he had planned to create “a collector hallway.” During the design process, he went to MIT to hear a lecture by the Danish artist Olafur Eliasson, and he realized that “the viewer is part of the art” in one of the artist’s installation pieces. This inspired Joy to try something similar on the hall in his design, which resulted in the plan changing “into everything feeding off [the] one hallway (...).” Joy decided that the hall would have no electric lighting but would instead be lit by the ambient light emanating from the rooms adjacent to it. He says that “something like that happens on most projects.”

Another example of such a situation was during the design process of the Princeton train station. Joy had realized that the station would work as a net zero building, as the slight temperature variance that would be necessary for this to be possible would not affect the building’s practicality. The university ended up not allowing for this, but the idea still affected the final design. This meant that the design was realized with “opening (...) flaps” for the windows and seat placement with “[a person’s] back to the sun in the winter, (...)” and “with [a person’s] back to a wall on the north, protected from the cold (...)” According to Joy, this led to “a really rich atmosphere quality, with the light bounding off the wood, bouncing off the black steel (...)” He believes that this is the reason “why people get married there,” as “it is almost more like a chapel than a train station.”

Joy’s written answer to the question stated that “as the design unfolds and materials, details and systems begin to emerge, he tries to identify with these expressive qualities in terms of their own constructive logic in place-making,” continuing however that the expressive qualities “must always be subordinate to the ideas and atmospheric goals.” The interviewee clarifies this by explaining that, for example in a project done in Malibu, he designed the building further away from a cliff in order to see the vegetation before the ocean view. A similar approach was used in another project, a hotel in Mexico, where the building was also “called (...) back from the cliff” “so that you see trees, (...) a little bit of the site, and (...) some beach (...)” before “the ocean.” According to Joy, this “makes for a much better atmosphere,” compared to “just trying to make a painting.”

When asked whether the intuited atmosphere is subservient to the concept or vice versa, Joy answers that “the concept is quite often the atmosphere.” He explains how he had to “fight” to create “the single atmosphere” found in the Desert Nomad House.





Princeton Train Station in New Jersey

This included persuading the client to choose the appropriate materials and furniture placement to enable the atmospheric concept. The intuited moments such as “the rich green light show at night (...) and the gossamer wing moment” were used as tools “in the process with the client.” Joy calls designing “kind of a big mix,” and encourages to “not be too singular about” it, meaning that he also thinks about “function and use” in his work. Nevertheless, he concludes that “if the room does not feel great, to me it’s not doing my job,” which “has to do with (...) looking out the window first before designing (...) [it].”

**8. Which of these aspects (questions 5, 6, 7) do you find is the most important regarding their effect on the design process?**

In the interviewee’s written answers, he chooses the topics of questions three and seven as the most important. In the live interview he adds to his earlier answers by saying that to make “a room that has the atmosphere” he wants, he needs the appropriate structure. In the nomad house, this meant finding a way to make the building out of “floating boxes,” so the design process is not as “direct” as having every aspect be subordinate to the emotional connection. Despite saying this, Joy advises to “always go back to” the “initial desire,” “the root of what [you] are trying to achieve.”

The interviewee says that his firm does not present clients with multiple design choices, instead focusing the meetings with the clients on “atmosphere (...), view, or placement on the site. He tells that “things change when you learn something (...) does not quite work,” explaining that projects are changed, if for example a site is found to be too steep, although the aim is to “keep some of the things we wanted.” However, Joy also admits that he has only once been forced to abandon an idea because his client “did



not like it.” He had designed a “crawl space” with a wooden floor on top of it, and the client said that, due to his weight, he did not “want to walk around on creaky floors in [his] home.” The new structure was more expensive but was paid for by the clients nonetheless. Joy also mentions that another one of his projects went over budget and had to be changed.

At the end of the interview, Joy reiterates his design philosophy, saying that he cares about the feel of a space, “the feelings in a space”, and describes this as “a good way to (...) harness a direction and an energy (...) in a project.” In addition to this, he tries “to be as relentless as possible to hold on to [the direction].”

## **Interview with Steven Holl**

14.5.2018 | *written interview* | 2 pages (A4) | American, age 70

### **1. Are you conscious of atmospheres in your design process?**

Holl writes that his projects begin “with an idea that drives a design” and “develop with space light, material, texture and detail.” He further describes each project as beginning with “information and disorder, confusion of purpose, program ambiguity, infinity of materials and forms,” which “like obfuscating smoke, swirl in a nervous atmosphere.” Architecture is, according to Holl, “a result of acting on this indeterminacy.”

For the interviewee, “phenomenology as a way of thinking and seeing has become an agent for architectural conception.” He states however that phenomenology “relies on perception of pre-existing conditions” and as such cannot form “a-priori beginnings.” As the making of “non-empirical architecture” necessitates these, “a conception of a formative idea” is needed.

### **2. How would you define atmosphere?**

Holl remarks that he has “let go of the word” atmosphere, and points out that Peter Zumthor “uses it a lot.” He instead prefers the term “experiential phenomena.”

### **3. How would you describe the role of atmosphere in buildings during the design process?**

The interviewee writes that the “experience of phenomena (...) provides a ‘pre-theoretical’ ground for architecture.” This “perception is pre-logical” and “requires a suspension of a-priori thought.” Questions of perception encourage us “to experience



architecture by walking through it, touching it, [and] listening to it.” “Seeing things” necessitates “slipping into a world below the everyday neurosis of the functioning world,” which Holl describes as “an underground city for which we have keys without locks,” and that is “full of mysteries.”

**4. How does the perception of the intuited atmosphere affect your mood during the design process? Does this have implications for the design process itself?**

The interviewee has not written an answer to this question. Upon asking his secretary why this might be, she replied that she was sure, that Holl had seen it, “thought he would come back to it,” but found that he “had to move onto the next project.”

**5. How do your client’s wishes affect the design process?**

Holl describes the client as part of the “forces” that “initiate the design process.” He then works “from a central idea,” which is “a concept that attempts to create public space and anchor a new work in a particular place.” According to the interviewee, “good clients allow this creativity to evolve.”

**6. How does the projected beholder of the building affect the design process?**

The interviewee writes that “the most important dimension” for his architecture “is the beholder’s experience of space, light, circulation, sequence, material and detail.” He calls the “idea” driving the design a “heuristic tool,” and concludes that it “could remain unknown if the special experience is uninspiring” for the beholder.



House at Martha's Vineyard in Martha's Vineyard



**7. How does the building and its unfolding design affect the design process?**

Holl explains that his office works from his “concept watercolors (...) directly into study models.” The models “are working tools to develop the concept in materiality” and not intended “for presentations.” Holl presents an example of this, writing that the models made for “the house in Martha’s Vineyard (...) were made of wood sticks,” because the concept was based on “a whale skeleton.” Another example is the “Helsinki model for the ‘inter-twining’ concept,” which was made in “carved plaster or twisted lumps of wax.” Holl’s concept dictates the material of each model. This is an “in-between stage,” that is followed by the move from “the materiality of the model to the materiality of construction.”

**8. Which of these aspects (questions 5, 6, 7) do you find is the most important regarding their effect on the design process?**

Holl chooses the beholder as the topic, which most influences the design process. He writes that it has “the potential to change the way we live.” According to the interviewee, “the user’s experience is a crucial core aspect of great architecture.”

**Interview with Emanuel Christ**

3.7.2018 | *written interview* | 1 page (A4) | Swiss, age 50

**1. Are you conscious of atmospheres in your design process?**

Stating that the notion of “atmosphere” does not “belong to our conceptual and operative toolbox, Christ writes that his company “does not rely” on the concept in their design work. He admits that atmosphere “might affect [the company’s] work implicitly” but explains that without their “own working definition already defined,” he finds it “hard to answer.” He describes “the company’s” design process as something that relies “more often to the context, and the corresponding rules it generates.”

**2. How would you define atmosphere?**

The interviewee does not answer the question but instead refers back to his answer to question number one.

**3. How would you describe the role of atmosphere in buildings during the design process?**

Christ does not answer the question but instead refers back to his answer to question number one.

**4. How does the perception of the intuited atmosphere affect your mood during the design process? Does this have implications for the design process itself?**

The interviewee does not answer the question but instead refers back to his answer to question number one.



### **5. How do your client's wishes affect the design process?**

Christ writes that his desire is for the company's architecture "to be the outcome of a concerted process of development and design that is shaped by the existent context as well as by the dialogue with our clients." The company starts from "the client's needs and expectations," brings their "expertise, knowledge and 'infrastructure' to the table," and attempts to "provide the best solutions for the practical and symbolic questions that (...) exist (...) and may arise." The "questions" may be "implicitly conflicting" or unclearly identifiable and make for a "frustrating" process but despite this, Christ believes in his company's capacity to "satisfy the client" and "comply to [the company's] vision for the site and for the new building." The interviewee also explains that his company does not "perceive [their work] as the result of a 'heroic' and singular authorial gesture," and comments that this approach "still characterizes some dominant positions in the contemporary architectural scene."

### **6. How does the projected beholder of the building affect the design process?**

The projected beholder "has an influence" on the design process — "sometimes even more than the client" — according to Christ. He writes that his company strives to build "performing buildings able to fulfill the expectations of the users and anticipate their needs."

### **7. How does the building and its unfolding design affect the design process?**

The interviewee writes that he does not "understand this question."

### **8. Which of these aspects (questions 5, 6, 7) do you find is the most important regarding their effect on the design process?**

Christ believes that "the building" is the most important aspect regarding its effect on the design process, as "[in] the end it is only about architecture."



## 4. Main Findings

This chapter focuses on my interpretations of the interview data. The first two chapters will focus on the similarities and differences within the interviewees' answers, with observations on the tones of the interviews. My purpose will be to interpret the meanings behind the words of the interviewees. The third chapter focuses on the research questions, and attempts to create an in-depth connection between the general findings of the first two chapters and the research subjects — atmosphere, empathy and their relationship in the architectural design process.

### 4.1 Similarities Across the Interviews

Atmosphere is linked to the experiential affect afforded by architecture for almost all of the interviewees — only Emanuel Christ refuses to describe its nature and meaning. As Pallasmaa says in his interview, atmosphere could be regarded as the “overall feeling” conveyed by an imagined building. Its non-focused nature seems to be a prime concern for him, as well as for Leiviskä, Tsien, Williams, and Celsing. They all think that atmosphere cannot be a pre-meditated part of architecture but must instead arise from the building design process, implying that it is the byproduct of the more practical aspects of building design, for example the placement of building elements. Tsien, Williams, and Celsing all mention that they attempt to remain somewhat “basic” in their design considerations, alluding to the virtues of more practical considerations over those of a more theoretical nature. Furthermore, any focused push towards an intuited atmosphere is seen as detrimental to its creation; Tsien and Williams describe atmospheres created in such a way as “cheap.”



The creation of atmosphere is seen by Leiviskä, Celsing, Tsien, and Williams as a process involving a some type of sacrifice; Caruso seems to also agree with this, as he describes the act of building as “torture.” The way the design process is described seems to highlight the value of this to a large degree: each of the architects uses metaphors of passion — most notably those of pain — when talking about the design process, with Williams going so far as to speak of a knife being “thrust into him” when his design is talked about during its genesis. This concept seems to connect with a vulnerability that the architects also speak of: an architect must be sensitive to a wide variety of influences that they come into contact with during the design process. Vulnerability, by its very nature, brings with it the danger of being hurt. This seemingly damaging, passionate relationship with design work seems to be of paramount importance when one attempts to imbue their design work with atmosphere.

Pallasmaa notes in his interview that the design process precludes a mental investment in the work and alludes to the connection between pain and this phenomenon. According to him the pain associated with the design process arises from changes made to the plans of the architect and thus a disturbance in the relationship between the work and its creator. He goes on to clarify that it is “important to have the process change the original idea.” In his view this is a sign of a “wise craftsman” at work. Celsing too, implies this by remarking that design changes — even ones that originally may seem disappointing for the architect — give the building “urgency.”

Atmosphere is such a powerful driver for most of the interviewees that the other facets of design seem to be wholly mixed with it. The process of designing is indistinguishable from the act of creating an atmosphere. Atmosphere is — as Leiviskä

notes in his interview — in the “background” of the process as a sort of perpetual force. According to Pallasmaa, the design process itself already has an atmosphere, which he describes as the “carrying attitude.” This atmosphere is melded into the architecture itself upon completion. Williams agrees with this, saying that the spirit of the architect leaves its mark onto a building’s atmosphere as long as the architect keeps working on the design.

When the above conditions for the genesis of atmosphere — a non-mediated, process-produced, allusive atmosphere that is — are inspected, one can conclude that according to Pallasmaa, Leiviskä, Tsien, Williams, and Celsing an intuited atmosphere is an oxymoronic creation: it is a consideration of paramount importance for the architects, yet they should refrain from considering it while designing, lest it be spoiled. It is — as Williams puts it — a “gift,” which an architect reaches through subconscious guidance.

Leiviskä, Tsien, Williams, Celsing, Joy, and Caruso all regard the creation of atmosphere in the background of the design process as almost an entity with its own life. They use words of personification when describing the design process and the building arising from it. Williams speaks of it as a “spirit,” Tsien imagines it as “a life,” Leiviskä says that the design starts to “live” already at its onset, Caruso states that he likens designs to people, Joy speaks of “giving breath” to a project, and Celsing speaks about how his designs start to ‘tell’ him what “fits or does not.” The design process is likened to the act of “breathing” by Tsien and Williams — a figurative, continuous dialogue, or a process of back and forth. Pallasmaa clarifies this by saying that atmosphere arises from a dialogue “between what you are” and “what you are doing,” which he explains to mean his emotive self interacting with his work. The dialogue thus exists between the architect



and the design itself — another notion that gives projects traits belonging to living beings.

Leiviskä, Celsing, and Joy all speak of rhythm as connected to atmosphere. To them, the phenomenon seems to be tied to the sequence of architectural spaces or elements that the architect curates in their design. Celsing thinks that “rhythm is good — in a piece of architecture.” He explains that this “structured” approach creates possibilities for “nuances” to emerge. Leiviskä instead seems to link rhythm to an emotive reading of architecture, comparing built works to music and saying that, in the end, such a reading is outwardly similar to a more technical one but nevertheless showcases different aspects of the project. Joy explains that his connection to the experiential aspects of architecture has always come naturally, thanks to his prior work as a musician. He sees the rhythm-driven emotional atmosphere of a song in a similar way as he does atmosphere in architecture. According to both Joy and Celsing, the “space between the notes” is more profound in terms of this emotional tone, which seems to describe a distinct metaphor — perhaps a type of guideline — to their understanding and creation of atmospheric designs. A spatial sequence together with other elements of architecture can seemingly be felt when they are reflected upon as parts of a greater whole, with shifts and changes to their emotive impact. The fact that this reflection needs to consider a whole, instead of distinct parts, appears to be a necessity.

What then, is a design process devoid of atmosphere? Pallasmaa, Leiviskä, Tsien, Williams, and Celsing, allude to it being a forced process, where an architect refuses to let their subconscious guide them and where they refuse to change their designs. Leiviskä remarks that an architect should not fall in love with their design immediately, so that they not force it when a complication arrives. Williams warns against letting the design off

the designers hands too soon, describing its capacity to live and change without a connection to its creator. According to him, an essence of the designer within a building’s atmosphere is desirable. Too little or too much control seems to be detrimental to the creation of the phenomenon. Leiviskä remarks that an architect lacking in sensitivity can create a building that is dead — as in lacking an atmosphere — no matter how great the design might otherwise be. Celsing agrees by implying the same: empathy in the design process is important in order to create architecture that affects people in a positive way. He says that attentiveness and scholarship are important in order to “understand the situation.” The aforementioned sensitivity also serves as a key to understanding the push and pull of the design process, as well as the needs of the personified project. In more practical terms, Leiviskä, Caruso, and Celsing explain, that a building must be designed for a specific time and place, in order for atmosphere to manifest. This again ties in with sensitivity: the architect must be able to read their design brief and its context in order to create a project that reaches a desired level of specificity. What this level is, seems to be left up to the architect to decide.

All of the architects view their place in the design process as crucial for the creation of atmosphere. In contrast the client is seen as an entity that must be idealized by the designer in order to be as useful as possible for the process: all interviewees except for Holl and Christ either outright say this or strongly allude to this being the case. The client is seen as the starting point — and thus important — for the design process by all of the architects. Caruso and Celsing however see them as even more valuable, pointing out that designs cannot develop optimally without the clients input. This connects to the figurative concept of dialogue mentioned earlier: the design process is an actual spoken dialogue in addition to existing between the architect and the design itself.



Pallasmaa adds to this by saying, that as the architect internalizes the client, the dialogue starts to take place within the architect's mind, thus bridging the gap between the figurative and the literal. Seemingly, the design process needs multiple influencers to become “alive” enough to create an atmosphere. Williams also alludes to this by talking about the process needing ‘heat.’

A good design process also seems to necessitate that clients are steered “away from the conventional,” as Joy puts it. Mundanity is seen as detrimental to the creation of atmosphere by Pallasmaa and Leiviskä as well. Caruso says that the design process requires a situation where pre-conceived ideas for the design are left behind by both the architect and the client. This seems to be linked with the aforementioned requirements of a good design process: an architect's acceptance of change and sensitivity to different facets affecting the design process. Pre-conceived ideas may serve as detrimental constraints for the creative process and lead to an undesirable end result.

The client of a project is often one of its beholders as well, so speaking about both of them at the same time is natural. However, many of the interviewees mixed up these two entities entirely: Leiviskä, Caruso, Celsing, and Joy all speak about their clients and the beholders of their project in a design process without always necessarily making distinctions between them. Caruso's interview seems to imply that this has to do with whether the client is an institutional entity or a private individual, with a more faceless operation necessitating a different approach to its wishes. Celsing seems to agree with this, as he describes three different types of clients: the individual, the competition brief, and the developer. Out of these, the developer is handled in a similar way to Caruso's institutional client, because the architect seems to be left with a greater responsibility for the quality of the architectural experience, that its users and beholders will face.

Indeed, Levis also speaks about his focus on crafting architecture that is most beneficial to its users, emphasizing the necessity of an empathic connection to their experience. While Holl and Christ do not mix up the client and the beholder in their answers — perhaps because of the written format of their interviews — they too mention the importance of a building's users. Williams and Tsien, however, describe most clearly what the other interviews allude to: a building's potential user allows for an architect to “place [themselves] in [their] shoes.” The framing of the interview questions seem to separate the client and the beholder into intellectual and emotive categories: the client's wishes serve as the intellectual catalyst for the start of a project, while the client's capacity to be a user of the building, together with the building's intuited beholders, incite the empathic connection necessary for the architect to design the experiential phenomena of architecture.

Interview question number four focused on the interaction between the interviewee's mood and the intuited atmosphere during the design process. This question caused confusion for most of the interviewees — with for example Christ and Holl not even answering it. Williams on the other hand explained that he could not intuit “a spirit” and thus did not know if it was the intuited atmosphere that caused his moods to change during the design process. His use of passionate words when describing the design process does imply that his mood does indeed change however — even if the cause of this remains unknown. Caruso explained that his mood is affected when the design work is going poorly but that the effect of this is not particularly noticeable since the process takes a long time. Celsing's experience seems similar, as he said that while his moods do change, he attempts to remain critical of them while designing, and holding onto skepticism with regard to his emotive judgement. With the process being as long as it is, he too seemed to imply that the effect of his moods



was not important. Leiviskä simply said that when he feels that his design is “on the right track,” he feels joy. He — like the others — seemed mostly confused about why the question was proposed in the first place, perhaps implying that Tonino Griffero’s views on atmosphere do not apply to intuited atmosphere: after all, an intuited atmosphere already exists within the emotive realm of a person and forgoes the transition from a physical place to emotive perception. Another interpretation could also be however, that Griffero’s view on atmosphere simply does not apply.

Three of the interviewees speak about the nature of atmosphere in finished buildings as well. Leiviskä believes that — as with intuited atmosphere — analyzing or characterizing atmosphere while perceiving it in physical spaces, can kill it. Williams seems to agree, as he believes atmosphere to be “completely allusive” in all its forms. Caruso explains that atmosphere and empathy are in jeopardy because of the neoliberal economy, and that the current mindset does not understand such phenomena. While this makes them weak, they are also resistant because of their wholly non-intellectual nature. Caruso values this, as such phenomena allow built architecture to transport their beholders to the past. This seems to imply that while a building’s atmosphere and an intuited atmosphere share an elusive, fragile nature, a built building gains a distinct influence in the fourth dimension.

The interviewees agree on the importance of atmosphere for completed buildings — so much so that it is a crucial part of what Steven Holl calls “great architecture.” Pallasmaa agrees, and says, that a “poetic experience” is a necessity for buildings to even be considered architecture. Tsien and Williams believe that at their ‘core,’ buildings are about the sense of experience that they convey to the people within them. Caruso also has a similar opinion, as he considers the way a building “feels and looks,” to be “the primary thing.” This would imply that a building is ultimately

successful if the architects are able to perceive an atmosphere while within them. Other than Pallasmaa’s mention of the poetic, the quality of the atmosphere is left open — perhaps necessarily so, as its elusive nature may be difficult to verbalize.

As a concluding note, it must be mentioned, that the nationalities of the interviewees seem to have little effect on their views regarding atmosphere and empathy. The common themes and differences that arose in this study did not correspond to the nationalities of the architects but instead transcend these categorizations. In addition to this, the sample sizes from each geographic region are so small that claiming commonalities between the architects based on their professional contexts would be questionable; the only way in which an assumption could have been made, would have been if the interviewees had expressly stated the impact their environment had on their work. An interviewees’ relationship with the subjects of the study appears to have more to do with their personal inclinations as an architect.

## **4.2 Differences between the Interviews**

While the experiential perspective on atmosphere is shared by the interviewees, its atmospheric properties — the air within the building — are noted only by Celsing and Joy. Caruso on the other hand describes the phenomenon as a character of the building, drawing upon his knowledge of the stylistic discussions from the 1800s. He also separates atmosphere into the whole, comprising the entire building, and the separate experience of its interior spaces. The atmosphere that a building’s exterior is able to portray is largely connected to its character. The other interviewees do not make this distinction and either speak of only the interior spaces of a building, or its entirety, when considering an intuited atmosphere.



While atmosphere is a fundamental concern for most of the architects, Steven Holl notes that drawing from the intuited phenomenon cannot create a-priori designs. An intuited atmosphere has a connection with the imagination of an architect, which is based upon their past experiences. These experiences are something already experienced and cannot thus constitute anything Holl would consider new. Out of all the interviewees, he alone places such importance on intellectual concepts as sources of his design work. Comparing this with Pallasmaa is most telling, as he actively points out their weakness as a driver of design: concepts are intellectual constructs and by their very nature detached from feelings. However, Holl seems to be aware of the benefits and weaknesses of emotive atmosphere as well as those of intellectual ideas: according to him, the experience of atmosphere is “pre-logical” and allows us a sort of escape from the mundanity of everyday “neurosis.” He believes that if the experience one of his buildings generates is strong enough, its beholders will become aware of the original, intellectual concept behind the building. Unlike many of the other interviewees, he seems to believe in bridging the gap between the emotive and the intellectual, and implies that there are benefits to this.

While Pallasmaa, Leiviskä, Tsien, Williams, and Celsing explain that atmosphere cannot be a preconceived, targeted outcome, Joy and Caruso seem to regard the matter from different perspectives. For Rick Joy, design goals are often experiential effects, which constitute atmospheres, and make for a very different approach to the phenomenon. While the other architects see atmosphere as an outcome of a successful design process that is not focused on its creation, Joy builds his design concepts on very distinct manifestations of the phenomenon. Adam Caruso on the other hand has a more analytical approach to the creation of

atmosphere: he thinks of a past atmospheric experience and compares the intuited atmosphere from the design he is working on to what he remembers the former experience feeling like. This action either points him towards necessary design changes or makes him conscious of something new and interesting in terms of building atmosphere. Caruso oscillates between controlled and emergent design: he writes that even upon completion his buildings manage to surprise him even though his office “really (...) tries to control everything.” It could be argued that neither Joy nor Caruso are working directly with atmosphere however, because as they are manipulating their designs, they are most likely oblivious to the atmosphere they will intuit from them after completing said manipulation; there appears to be a step-by-step process associated with their descriptions. Nevertheless, their view on the matter differs in its willingness to engage with the phenomenon in a more direct way when compared to the manner employed by Pallasmaa, Leiviskä, Tsien, Williams, and Celsing — architects, who seem to actively warn against focusing directly on atmosphere while designing.

Rick Joy sees atmosphere as not just a goal but as a practical tool in his design process: he is in a position where he can immerse his clients into spaces which he has created, and speak about his design ideas through these experiences. Atmosphere functions as a communication tool here in a very fundamental way. In Joy’s office, the architect intuitively experiences spatial experiences along with his employees, showing that not only atmosphere but intuited atmosphere as well, can serve in this capacity. While it seems that his narration of atmosphere posits him as the focal point — with his employees playing a supporting role — the technique is able to nevertheless make use of the intuited feelings of people of different ages, sexes, and races by having the entire office engage in this activity. This partly offsets one of the common criticisms of



phenomenology, and allows Joy to focus on atmosphere — again highlighting the difference between his viewpoint and those of the other interviewees.

The designers hardly specify how they go about designing atmospheric spaces, except for Juha Leiviskä, who explains his reverence for taking advantage of the environment surrounding the building to create atmosphere. Leiviskä believes that by creating something to add to a pre-existing atmosphere found at a building site, an architect will generate a unique atmosphere for their building. He specifies that a caveat applies to this however: the building must not “blend” with its surroundings but instead create a harmonious and ‘lively interaction.’ Leiviskä further explains that he has learned “methods” for bringing light into his designs in ways that create atmosphere, while also explaining his use of materials in conjunction to this. This contrasts with his earlier statement about a design analysis endangering the phenomenon; clearly then his ‘methods’ do not require this. Leiviskä’s design methodology must be so intuitive that he is able to circumvent the damaging, intellectual exploration, despite being able to verbalize and distinguish parts of it. While the other interviewees do not specify their design methodologies in such practical terms, they too seem to possess an intuitive knowledge about how their design methods create atmosphere, even though they refrain from separating them into their constituents. For example, Rick Joy speaks of his “what if phase,” where he narrates the experiences within his design, placing building elements intuitively to reach a desired outcome, while Adam Caruso, speaks of his use of references, that help him determine the character of his buildings. The specific means of atmosphere creation in design processes appears to be largely subconscious.

While most of the architects seem to speak of the design process in a way that personifies it, Williams in particular goes

further with this, describing atmosphere as the spirit of the building. According to him, the feeling of an atmosphere arises from the spirit of the beholder coming into contact with that of the building. The religious connotations of this word — together with his passionate delivery about the nature of the phenomenon during the interview — paint a picture of a more intimate relationship between the architect and his creations. Williams speaks of the design process as something that creates this spirit, which also ends up containing the spirit of the architect in question. He clarifies that an architect, who maintains their relationship with the design, will have more of their spirit imbued in it compared to one that does not. He also brings up the notion of ownership with respect to this: is a design containing only a little of an architect’s spirit even theirs? Based on Williams’ words, buildings are constructs containing the spirits of the people who contribute to their construction in an amount that is relative to the total each person has contributed. The architect seemingly values design projects — and the creation of atmospheres within them— in great capacity, as he sees them as extensions of his being. Perhaps this also explains the greater degree in which he uses words of passion, such as “pain” and “love,” in his interview; he seems to feel even more strongly about the subject matter than most of the other interviewees. (It is of importance to note, that Billie Tsien — the other half of the design duo — does not agree with Williams’ statement, and sees atmosphere more as a product of a “projected beholder’s experience” while also disputing the impact of a supposed spirit.) Williams does however, share his belief in part with Celsing, who sees his buildings as “fragments of his attitude.” This would imply a similar relationship between the architect and his creation, yet without the religious connotations; Celsing does not elaborate further on this notion, making further exploration difficult.



Pallasmaa states that a designer must think beyond everyday practicalities for their work to turn into architecture (i.e., have atmosphere). Out of the other interviewees, he alone mentions everyday practicalities in a negative light: Celsing, Williams, and Tsien seem to attribute their success partly to the fact that they look at architecture from this “basic” vantage point. While this at first seems to be a clear difference, it must be noted that Celsing, Williams, and Tsien are all still aware of atmosphere in their design processes. Perhaps Pallasmaa means that the consideration of “only” everyday practicalities is detrimental to the creation of successful architecture, and that a designer must have ambitions other than these. Thus, the creation of atmosphere would necessitate the passionate relationship with one’s work that is the product of ambition, which would tie in with the rest of the interview answers.

Unlike the other interviewees, Caruso splits atmosphere into a phenomenon exhibiting cultural connotations and affect. He knows about the origins of such discourse in the 1800s and describes this as a search for what is stylistically appropriate in a particular design. Later in the 1900s, this discourse melds with phenomenology and becomes the talk about “meaning.” According to Caruso, talk of atmosphere gives architects a way to speak about the meaning of their work without explicitly connecting it to culture. The other interviewees do not describe the connection between style and atmosphere nor between meaning and atmosphere. Celsing does however say that the question of appropriateness is of great importance in his design work but connects it to atmosphere from a more economical point of view; Celsing does not believe that atmosphere can be built, if one cannot “afford it.” The way the interviewees view the meaning of their own work — and perhaps architecture in general for that matter — is alluded to in the interviews of Tsien,

Williams, Leiviskä, Caruso, Joy, and Celsing, as these architects communicate the value of atmosphere as the greatest goal of architecture. This implies that they view architecture at least in part as a vehicle for the experiential phenomenon. Caruso however goes deeper with this belief and states that the value of these phenomena, i.e. atmosphere and empathy, is in having a capacity to act as vessels of collective memory: resisting the economically driven worldview, and thus a form of *zeitgeist*, they transport their beholders to the past through an empathic link. This makes buildings timeless in their current context, forever linked to the moment of their completion, and nostalgia a constituent of architectural experience and an element of atmosphere.

For Caruso, buildings come alive at the end of the design process in a manner different from what he perceives during the design phase: they start their own life upon completion separate from the architect who designed them. He dislikes the notion that the architect and their building have a “symmetrical relationship.” While Caruso uses words of personification when speaking about the design process, he seems to create a distinction between the building’s life after said process is complete. This view is in great contrast to those of Leiviskä, Tsien, Williams, and Celsing, who appear to be connected to their buildings even after their completion.

Emanuel Christ’s interview is very different from the others, not only because of its written nature, but because of its detached tone. His answers seem to be given from the perspective of his company and not from his own viewpoint. This is reflective of the lack of contact between the interviewer and the interviewee, and shows an even stronger reluctance to delve into the subject compared to Celsing in his first interview for instance. Moreover, Christ completely refuses to speak about atmosphere, saying that it does not affect the design work within his company.



The buildings of Christ Gantenbein nevertheless have strong atmospheres, which perhaps highlights what has been stated before: atmosphere is the byproduct of a great design process. Towards the end of his interview, Christ does note that the ‘building’ is the most important thing in the design process, as “[in] the end, it is all about architecture.” This implies that he does share similar values to those exhibited by the other interviewees, and curiously, Caruso uses an almost exact wording in his answer to the question; although the meaning behind the word “architecture” is of course likely different. If asked further questions regarding his answer, Christ might perhaps explain his views on the nature of architecture, and perhaps give an implication about the value of atmosphere as well.

The architects believe strongly in themselves as agents driving the design process forward. It is they who bear responsibility for the success and failure of the design, even though many of the interviewees — such as Celsing and Williams — also mention the need for the love of craft that the construction crews need to feel for their work. This is also alluded to in the way they speak about their clients; as has been previously described. While the interview is personal and only focuses on the opinions of individual people in the architectural field, it is notable that only Emanuel Christ seems averse to the individualistic premise of the study. He explains that his company does not perceive their work as the result of a “heroic” and “singular authorial gesture.” His view of his own agency seems to be different from that of the other interviewees.

Both Celsing and Williams see their role in the design process as oscillating: they speak of themselves as orchestra ‘conductors’ or smaller players at times, and thus not always the agents in control of the design work. Nevertheless, the interviewees talk little about their employees, with Leiviskä even explaining that he

has to be alone in order to create the genesis of his designs. This would imply that it is not the employees directing the work when the architect plays a smaller role but instead the design itself: the employees are not stated to be the drivers of the design process by any of the interviewees but the project is repeatedly cited to develop on its own. This further showcases the architect’s roles in the design process — and shows them in the way Christ talks about.

The way the interviewees answer the questions is seemingly connected to how much they feel at ease. While this is usually the case with interview studies, the more elusive subject matter of this study seems to highlight this: spoken interviews yield more personal answers — as can be seen when comparing the interviews of Christ and Holl to those of for example Tsien, Williams, and Pallasmaa. Conducting a second interview (Celsing and Joy), meeting the interviewee in person (Leiviskä), or knowing them beforehand (Pallasmaa, Caruso) seems to increase the amount of information an interview can yield. The spoken interviews also allowed for clarifying the questions that were harder to understand — a problem evident in Christ’s confusion with question number seven. With the interview study linked to the design process, the interviewees had the possibility to speak — or in this case write — in a more detached tone and to simply communicate their typical answers related to their office’s methodology. The more comfortable the interviews felt, the more personal the interviewees’ viewpoints became, and the more deeply they seemed to ponder the subjects of atmosphere and empathy in their answers.

While question number four regarding the architect’s mood during the design process caused confusion in the interviewees, there were two people who had distinct answers to the questions. The first was Juhani Pallasmaa — perhaps because he helped formulate the question and thus knew what to expect. He



explained that his changing moods served as the aforementioned emotive dialogue, which he saw as a crucial design tool. The second person with a similar outlook was Rick Joy. He confirmed that mood is indeed an “emotional dialogue,” and that one had to get into the mood they want their building’s atmosphere to generate in order to design it in the first place. The answers of the two architects mirror each other, and give a distinct interpretation of the relationship between atmosphere and emotion. Another question is however, to which degree a mood and a feeling are symmetrical and whether there is a disparity between the emotive processes behind them.

Johan Celsing seems conflicted in his interview. He starts out by explaining his methodology and reverence of atmosphere and empathy, yet posits the client as the most important influencer in the design process by the interview’s end. The conflict seems to arise from his belief that without highlighting the client’s importance, architects risk becoming “high-brow intellectuals,” something that Celsing wants to apparently avoid at all costs. He also thinks that, focusing on the beholder can mask an architect’s own desires, as an imagined beholder is always viewed through the lens of the architect. This seems to imply that Celsing attempts to avoid detachment from the more practical — universally acknowledged — influencers, and maintains a questioning attitude towards the designer’s ego. In addition to this, he contradicts himself by first saying that every building has atmosphere, yet later explaining that “atmosphere does not happen if you cannot afford to build it,” explaining that clients often ask him to design expensive looking buildings on the cheap. Celsing’s words imply a reluctance to comply with such requests. One could thus conclude, that the architect intuitively perceives atmospheres of different value, highlighting a preference for certain types of atmospheres. In addition to this however, he believes that the

influence of the client’s ego must be questioned together with that of the designer’s in order to create atmospheric architecture.

Although it was not alluded to in the interview questions themselves, three of the interviewees briefly mention the issue of legacy, and an architect’s reputation among their peers. Williams explains that his design process is not affected by what other architects think about his work. While Caruso says that the discourse, comments, and criticism, generated by one of his buildings being finished “does matter” to him; it is left ambiguous whether this affects Caruso’s design process, however. Celsing talks about legacy when asked about the influence of an imagined beholder, saying that he is not concerned about how people in the future perceive his buildings. While these comments are brief, it is curious that they come up in an interview that does not touch upon them. Based on the answers of the three interviewees however, it would appear that questions of reputation and legacy are not important to the architects and their design processes — at least when it comes to intimate subjects such as atmosphere and empathy. Further inquiry would be required in order to determine a clear answer to the matter.

The interviewees do not agree on what has the greatest effect on their design process: the final interview question asked only about the importance of the last three factors (the client, the beholder, and the unfolding design), yet many of the interviewees chose other influencers as their answer. Leiviskä and Holl thought that the beholder, or a building’s users, are the most important factors, while Caruso, Joy, and Tsien attributed the greatest value to an architect’s capacity to be conscious of atmospheres. Rick Joy believed in the importance of the unfolding design, as did Emanuel Christ — at least implicitly. Johan Celsing was the only one, who highlighted the client’s importance to a great degree, while Williams chose all of the influencers featured in



the empathy questions, saying that he “embeds” himself into everything. Pallasmaa on the other hand said that the design process itself had the greatest effect on his work. The varied answers imply that little hierarchy exists between the factors the interview questions were directly connected to. A building’s users and the capacity to perceive an intuited atmosphere seemed to be the most important elements, yet with the design process as tied to a dialogue of mixed influences, this would appear debatable. It could be concluded that indeed no singular factor dominates the design process but that they all influence the conscious and the subconscious mind as internalized agents, acting through the medium of intuition.

### 4.3 Answers to the Research Questions

#### 1. What kind of role do empathy and atmosphere play in the architects design processes and how do they interact?

Based on the study findings, I would conclude that the creation of atmosphere equals a good design process for architects who are conscious and interested in experiential phenomena: the goal of atmosphere creation should not be addressed directly during the design process but left in the background for subconscious guidance. While this is the case for most of the interviewees, the architects whose methods differ from this appear to confront the phenomenon more directly; the people in question being Adam Caruso and Rick Joy. However, even when atmosphere creation is more of a deliberate procedure, it seems to be an inseparable part of the design process. Thus, if atmosphere is to be connected to empathy, one must simply ascertain whether empathy functions as an intuited vehicle for the imagination of an architect in creating an imagined architectural experience.

In her interview, Billie Tsien outright says that she designs based on “the experience or feeling of an imagined person in an imagined space.” She defines atmosphere as “a sense of experience.” This directly links empathy with an intuited atmosphere, as it is a necessity for sensing the experiential phenomenon. Juha Leiviskä says that he begins the design process by empathizing with both the beholder and the place where the architecture is to be located. Adding place into the equation brings the embodied experience of the architect into focus: Leiviskä must imagine himself as being in a particular place. While Tsien’s empathic view requires imagination, it could be argued to have a different quality to a purely self-centered interpretation by virtue of the stated desire to perceive the viewpoint of another person. It would thus seem that Leiviskä’s use of the word empathy means to maintain a perceptual sensitivity to the design site while Tsien’s empathy matches the notion of interpersonal empathy, meaning the projection of “an emotion [one feels] toward an object or a person” (Mallgrave 2005: 199; bracketed comments added).<sup>53</sup>

Johan Celsing questions an architect’s empathic connection in his interview by asking whether every form of emotional projection in the design phase is just the architect’s excuse to project their own viewpoint — and their own intuited experience — onto an imagined, other person. He believes that the notion of the beholder or user “has more to do with how the architect wants the building to be.” This echoes Pallasmaa’s idea that the architect “internalizes the client” but apparently, also the beholder and the user of an intuited building. The difference in these two perspectives is whether the architect is considered to be at fault in doing so; Celsing goes on to say that the supposed empathic

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<sup>53</sup> Mallgrave, Harry Francis. *Modern architectural theory: a historical survey, 1673-1968*. New York : Cambridge University Press, 2005.



connection to an intuited beholder can be simply used by the architect to sound more intellectual, making the connection disingenuous. The German word *Einfühlung* or “feeling-into,” from Vischer, functions more adequately here compared to the word empathy, as it attempts to describe the connection between a person and an object: the word “refers to a more thoroughgoing transference of our personal ego, one in which our whole personality to some extent merges with the object” (Mallgrave 2010: 77).<sup>54</sup> Intuiting a beholder of a building highlights the self-referential nature of the artistic process.

Based on the above, I would conclude that empathy acts as the vehicle for sensing intuited experiences in an architect’s design process, this meaning the intuited, interior atmospheres and the exterior character of buildings. This confirms what Pallasmaa (among others) has written in the past.<sup>55</sup> However, some caveats should be applied to this result. Pallasmaa’s writings were familiar to most, if not all, of the interviewees, and thus the composition of the study group most likely had an impact on the research findings. The study also brought to light some subtleties associated with the relationship between atmosphere and empathy that have not arisen in past theoretical material, such as the impact of an architect’s will into an intuited beholder, it could be argued that the nature of empathy can vary depending on the strength (or pressure) of this will. Further study on the nature of empathy is required in order to reach a more conclusive result, as this research treats the phenomenon as too much of a universal constant. The interviewees should have been asked about their

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54 Mallgrave, Harry Francis. *The architect’s brain: neuroscience, creativity, and architecture*. Chichester, West Sussex, U.K. ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

55 As a recent example, see Havik, Klaske, and Gus Tielens. “Atmosphere, Compassion and Embodied Experience, A Conversation about Atmosphere with Juhani Pallasmaa.” *OASE 91*, 2013: 41.

definition of empathy as well as atmosphere, as their perspectives would have then most likely displayed the way empathy is employed in their work.

## **2. What purpose do conscious and subconscious thought processes and embodied feelings have in each architect’s design process? How clear is this connection to them?**

Based on my observations during the interviews, the conscious and the subconscious are intertwined in the architectural design process to a great degree. Nevertheless, the architects who perceived their control of atmosphere during the design process to be greater, appeared to also have a greater awareness of their intuited processes: the ability to clearly articulate and compare different intuited atmospheres could be considered proof of this. These interviewees were Caruso, Joy, and Holl. The first two spoke about atmosphere as something more than just a background force prone to degradation upon instrumentalization, while the third, perceived the benefits of using the emotive and the intellectual when speaking about the two ephemeral subjects of the study. Both of these aspects separate these three interviewees from the rest: the other architects mostly saw attempts to articulate intuited atmospheres as a mistake, and cautioned against such an action. Intellectual analysis was also mostly seen as an unhelpful process, as was the case in Pallasmaa’s and Tod Williams’ interviews. This idea is of course predicated on the supposition that a more analytical view of an intuitive phenomenon such as atmosphere speaks of a greater awareness of the interplay of the conscious and the subconscious — an assumption that could easily be questioned based on the nature of the phenomenon.

It should be noted that while the two generations of interviewees did not display any clear differences from one another, the view



of the younger generation regarding atmosphere seemed to vary more than the older generation's. The more analytical perspectives discussed above (Caruso and Joy), and the absolute viewpoint regarding the phenomenon by Emanuel Christ would point to this being the case. Of course, this conclusion is debatable since the views of Steven Holl (older generation) and Johan Celsing (younger generation) do not match this interpretation. What is more certain however, is that Pallasmaa, Tsien, Williams, and Leiviskä all shared similar views on atmosphere: it seemed to me during the interviews that their tones and opinions were alike even though their words differed somewhat. I do not know how Steven Holl would have communicated his views but as he is closely associated with Pallasmaa, I would not be surprised if his spoken interview would have turned out the same. Conversely, the tones of the younger architects felt more varied, and each interview was surprising in its tone and message.

Despite the variety of views regarding atmosphere, all of the interviewees (except for Christ due to his detached tone) seemed to be well aware of their capacity for embodied experiences — intuited or actual — and their power in driving design processes. The holistic nature of our embodied existence seemed to permeate the interviews, as the interviewees often employed a rhetoric connected to their physical bodies: the words of pain attached to their design work is an example of this. Because the architects mostly venerated the sacrifice and pain of the design process, and often brought up the benefits of such an emotive focus, one could conclude that their embodied feelings are fundamental to their approach to architecture. What follows then, is that the connection between the architects' emotive capacity seems to naturally bring with it an embodied perspective.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter expands upon the findings of the research conducted. In the first section, I discuss a number of the issues highlighted in the research interviews, along with my general thoughts regarding the views expressed by the interviewees. The second section addresses the reliability of the study and reflects on the validity of this research. The third section highlights potential options for expanding this study by way of a general overview of the techniques and strategies deployed to conduct the interviews. Finally, I conclude with acknowledgements toward all of the parties that have contributed to this research.

### 5.1 Perspectives on the fusion of atmosphere and empathy

The interviewees speak about the design process very broadly in their answers, as befits the nature of intuited atmosphere, at least insofar as the notion has been developed in this study. This all-encompassing phenomenon contains such a depth of variety of possible subjects unto themselves that to discuss them all comprehensively here would substantially derail the aim of this section of the thesis. As such, only a selection of those aspects directly connected with the research focus will be closely analyzed here.

Perhaps the most overarching theme the interviewees talked about during my interviews was the great importance of sensitivity in design work. This notion of sensitivity appears to be tied to an architect's will (in the sense of "intent"), i.e.: the interviewees' words imply a caution towards authoritarian design choices, or perhaps even a Roarkian design approach. Despite



this, they generally venerate the part they play in the design process. I base this claim on the fact that it is the architect who is depicted as the prime agent in virtually all of the answers given by the interviewees. (However, I note again, that only Christ calls out the study for its individualistic approach.) Thus, *Einfühlung*, and the self-projection inherent to design work, seems to be at odds with the architects' personal observations: self-doubt and an affinity to listen to other people's opinions are fundamental to an architect's success, but not without an insistence on a personalistic design methodology. These attributes of empathy — the interaction between the self and its surroundings — challenge each other in the architectural design process, creating constant tension and stress.

Interestingly, this emphasis on an inherent tension between the self and its surroundings seemed to lead quite naturally, at least as far as the interviewees were concerned, to a kind of pain or suffering essential within the design process itself. As noted before, the capacity for a designer to change appears to be integral to "a successful design process," but how much of this ability to change entails a necessary suffering is based on an architect's own practically-informed observations and how much of it on the romantic sentiment of the "starving artist" is somewhat unclear. In the context of the fine arts, the trauma of the artist and artistic practice can be "inseparable from the creator's pain," such as in the works of Van Gogh and Goya (Barnett 2008)<sup>56</sup>, the connection is more abstract in architecture. But while the atmosphere of trauma depicted in fine art can provide a powerful catharsis for the beholder, in architecture, by contrast, this empathic connection (or a type of empathy, called "compassion" as articulated by psychologist Daniel Batson), is virtually impossible to reach. Thus

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56 Barnett, Laura. "The Art of Suffering." *The Guardian*. Guardian News & Media Company, February 21, 2008: <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/artblog/2008/feb/21/theartofsuffering>>.

architects are left with a socially acceptable form of this concept of "suffering-for-one's-art" but without the same level of pay-off typically visible in great artworks or the romantic hagiography of famous artists. Interestingly, this oxymoronic situation seems to add an unnecessary layer of stress on professionals working in architecture. Yet, with most of the interviewees in agreement, it seems that at least among the collegiate of such esteemed architects, this attribute of design work is not seen as a problem but instead something to aspire to, since it is generally taken to be an essential trait of mature design work.

The passionate relationship that an architect has with their work also seems to carry with it the tendency to imbue their creations with the status of personhood, as if the project had gained a soul. This penchant for personification is patently apparent in the interviewees' answers and can be seen as an extension of the empathic process itself insofar as transferring one's feelings and moods through working from a personally-intuited place has the effect of making the place created as much a part of the architect as the resulting (intuited) environment itself. Architectural creations thus seem to exist in a state of perpetual connection to the active consciousnesses of their creators, and as said people are alive, so too are these pieces of architecture, at least in some sense. At their genesis, architectural projects are, however, only tied to the imaginations of their creators, making it obvious that architects' would be prone to love their works (insofar as people tend to love their own creations). In short, we might say, following Merleau-Ponty's later thinking, that these creations are part of the "flesh of the world," as it were. That is to say, as these projects become finished — and thereby become part of the flesh of the world — they enter into a relationship with the psyches of those people who use the spaces as well, resonating quite clearly with Adam Caruso's words concerning a project's (second) birth. Thus, this



process of enlivening (in the sense of personification) could be seen as an extension of the ongoing nature of *Einfühlung* that an architect imbues in their work.

However, whether such enlivening is present within all works of architecture, or just those oft-called “great works” of architecture, is another question. The notion of “great architecture” comes up in Steven Holl’s interview, and is implicitly referred to in essentially all of the other interviews as well. Based on the architects’ words, the symmetrical relationship between a great design process and a great end-product is virtually guaranteed; great architecture necessitates great ingredients, so to say. As an intuited work of architecture is being imagined by multiple people during its creation and construction, the “good” design process could be inferred to mean that during the process, someone with sufficient imaginative power invests enough of their empathic capacity into the work in such a way to make it “come alive” (again, as outlined above). After this, the transitioning of the architecture into the physical world will determine the success of the project, meaning that the individuals constructing the building will also need to have enough passion for their work that the physical outcome manifests the original vision, as Williams explained in his interview. This would also mean that the design process is not predicated upon the empathic investment of the architect alone, but is in some sense a chain of empathy, beginning with the architect and potentially finding its way to the people who encounter the finished structure. With this logic, the concept of caring for something is elevated to a person projecting themselves onto animate and inanimate entities; empathy becomes a primary means of interaction in architectural work. The concept of *Einfühlung* thus serves to unify the design process by drawing together the entirety of a building’s essence. The implication here is that architectural design is less about a symmetrical relationship

between the beginning and end of a building’s lifecycle, and is instead more about establishing the conditions for a stable empathic “attunement” throughout the whole process (i.e. a consistent level of care and empathic investment needs to be maintained in the work).

Rick Joy and Adam Caruso display an affinity for immersing themselves in intuited atmospheres, using the phenomenon in a more analytical way by comparing and inspecting its various parts, despite (or perhaps with respect to) the totality inherent to it. As Joy implies, this is possible through his experience as a musician, where the ebb and flow of a given song’s sequence is necessary for understanding it as a whole, since the nature of the song as a whole is determined by its distinct parts and the idiosyncrasies of their relationships to one another. For Joy, the same is true of the atmospheres of architectural spaces. The idea of controlling a given design’s atmosphere throughout the design process seems to be tied to the designer’s intuition; virtually all of the interviewees imply that much of their work is based on intuitive decisions. The control of atmosphere would thus necessitate a capacity for self-reflecting on one’s intuitions in order to understand and make use of them. The discussion should, then, turn to intuition, and necessitate its understanding by way of analysis and description. In order to become more skilled in the creation of spatial atmospheres, an architect could endeavor to gain a greater awareness of the way they use the intuitions they’ve already developed as well as attempting to gain new forms of intuition that they might apply to their work.

As explained at the end of chapter two, *Einfühlung* and atmosphere share such a deep connection that it can be argued that they function in a similar way, with both acting as a kind of “between”-phenomenon holding the experience of architecture together. On the one hand, the distinct characteristic



of atmosphere itself, however, is its “affective totality” which entirely subsumes a given space, influencing those caught up in it almost instantaneously. *Einfühlung*, on the other hand, is more intimate, influencing a smaller portion of a given space mainly due to its function of facilitating encounters between people in the space, or people and objects present in the space. Thus, in my view, empathy is the more easily shared phenomenon in the architectural design process, since it can be activated by means of conversations and shared emotions, as well as a passion or interest in design more generally. Additionally, empathy also seems to take on a new form in the atmosphere of architecture upon the completion of a building. What seems most interesting to me about this is the potential for ongoing metamorphosis and the further interplay between the two phenomena of empathy and atmosphere; that is, a good design process is built upon empathy, whereas, according to my interviewees, an intuited atmosphere is veiled during the design process. However — and this is the interesting part — once the project is completed, it is a building or project’s atmosphere which becomes the more apparent — and therefore more readily accessible — phenomenon of the two. This points to a deeper relationship between the two than has been previously noted in architectural discourse, and may serve as a focal point for new studies into the role of empathy and/or atmosphere in architecture.

## 5.2 Validity and reliability of this phenomenological study

The phenomenological research interview presupposes that phenomena present themselves to our consciousness in similar ways. In other words, phenomenology maintains that individuals share a certain primordial awareness of their common reality. If

this is true, then the research method can identify fundamental elements that are common to different individuals’ experiences of a given phenomenon, and help us unveil the essential characteristics that concern this particular aspect of their common reality. However, this also details the limits of the study method, namely: “that the findings of a phenomenological study are valid only to the extent that its participants experienced the same basic phenomenon, and that this phenomenon was the same that the researcher intended to study in the first place” (Moreno, Valter 2002).<sup>57</sup>

The phenomena that are being investigated in phenomenological interview studies are commonly re-engineered for the interviewees to perceive during the research. This was not possible in the case of this study, which means that the results displayed herein cannot be claimed to apply universally, as — in the case of atmosphere for example — the phenomenon’s nature makes it questionable if the interviewees experience it in a similar way. While there is an attempt to alleviate this issue at the start of each interview session by inquiring, whether the interviewees understand the phenomenon in a similar way, this is still an issue that must be noted.

As explained before, the research conducted for this study is biased due to the involvement of Juhani Pallasmaa: his idea of atmosphere pervades my own understanding of the phenomenon, and has most likely influenced the opinions of all of the interviewees; it must also be noted that the fact that Pallasmaa was the thesis advisor, interviewee, and background material contributor is highly uncommon in research work. The interviewee choices (with the exception of Emanuel Christ) were either mine or Pallasmaa’s old associates and thus more willing to

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<sup>57</sup> Moreno, Valter, “Validity Issues in Phenomenological Research: Bridging Theory and Practice in a study of IT-Driven radical Organizational Change. *AMCIS*, 2002 Proceedings. 241. <<http://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2002/241>>.



participate, making them appropriate suggestions for the study. What follows then, is that the interviewees were not chosen based on usual methods employed in phenomenological research interviews: no preliminary questionnaire was used to determine the qualifications of the interviewees. The method for choosing the interviewees was based on which architects the author and Juhani Pallasmaa considered to be interested in the research subjects as well as whether they would be suited to answer questions related to them. Thus, the choice of the interviewees was biased, as the author and his advisor chose architects based on personal knowledge about them.

Furthermore, it could be argued that the biased choice of interviewees became an issue in the case of Emanuel Christ. Despite the architect agreeing to answer questions regarding atmosphere and empathy, he was not forthcoming with his answers. The phenomenon of atmosphere was apparently interesting to him but not a part of his design methodology. Choosing him was predicated on my false belief that his office's atmospheric architecture would most likely necessitate a design methodology that incorporated an awareness of atmosphere to some degree. This, however, was not the case; preliminary questions regarding his interests could have confirmed this before the interview was conducted and his involvement could have been reconsidered.

The way the study was conducted happened in a fairly uniform way, with few changes between the way the questions were asked from the interviewees. However, potential issues could be seen in the interviews that broke this uniformity: these being the two interviews that were conducted in a written format, as well as the introductory session preceding Johan Celsing's interview. The written interviews proved to be of less use in terms of information gathering when compared to the live interviews, and could be

considered a mistake; a mistake that was predicted from the start, however. They most likely depicted a skewed perspective of the respective interviewees' views because of their brevity, and lack of natural emphasis typically conveyed by spoken answers. Conversely, the introductory interview had a positive effect on the way the following interview situation felt, and assured that the dynamic for the research session was comfortable, resulting in more extensive data collection. This, however, had the opposite problem as potentially important information could be left with little focus due to the larger amount of data. The author's prior relationships with Rick Joy, and Adam Caruso also had an effect on the dynamics of the respective discussions. Thus, while the interviews themselves were carried out in a uniform manner, their subtext differed, making the sessions vary from one to the next.

Other more practical problems became apparent during the interview sessions. Firstly, it was not always possible to keep the interviewees on topic. This sometimes resulted in a need to steer the discussion back to the interview questions, which had the possibility of either constricting the answers of the speakers, or bringing to fore the assumptions of the interviewer. At other times the opposite happened, and the interviewees did not elaborate on their thoughts enough, providing little material for analysis. Secondly, I started to question whether the inclusion of question 7 regarding the effect that the unfolding design had on interviewees' design processes could be effecting their answers; their tendency to personify architectural work seemed to be surprisingly widespread. It was however concluded, that the way the question was posed had little effect on the interviewees since their attribution of personhood to their personal work was always apparent already towards the start of each interview. While the interviewees had seen the research questions beforehand, none of them seemed to have any memory of them during the interview



sessions. Thus, it was also concluded that this prior knowledge did not contribute to the act of personification.

Next, concerning my reasoning for the use of a more or less phenomenological methodology, it seemed to me that a phenomenological study could detail the minute changes in the interviewees' tones of voice, the pauses in their speech, and the way an interviewer feels about each encounter among other perceptual highlights. Descriptions of these aspects are lacking in this study and are only detailed in the "Main Findings" chapter, where including them is deemed appropriate (i.e. where a situation differs from the norm). This has been done in order to save space and make the paper more informative for readers interested in the substance of the messages communicated by the interviewees. This thesis could have been designed around the inclusion of an appendix containing the research interviews, which would have allowed for a more thorough explanation about the experiences I had when conducting the interviews; they were meticulously transcribed. Instead of this, however, the choice was made to include the interviews in the body of the text, as this made the paper more legible in its function as a master's thesis, and because of the wishes of one of the interviewees, Adam Caruso, who did not wish to publish his unedited interview.

Despite the importance of the above points, the greatest weakness of this study was the lack of diversity in the interviewees: all except one of the interviewees were men. In addition to this, the one Asian-American woman, Billie Tsien, answered the interview questions with her design partner, Tod Williams, which possibly affected her answers. While this was an issue known from the start — the generations chosen as targets of this study are notoriously male-dominated — the situation is still regrettable. One critique of certain approaches to phenomenology (such as an architectural approach) is that it is predicated on the world views of men due to

the identities of the philosophers who originated and developed the approach. Thus, it must be concluded that this study regrettably continues in a similar vein, and is subject to some of the common criticisms of a number of phenomenologically-inspired works of architectural theory today.<sup>58</sup>

### 5.3 Reflections on the research process and future prospects

For a more refined future study, the research questions of the interviews should be developed to include a broader view of empathy. As mentioned in the section discussing the research question answers, the disparate aspects of empathy became the defining attribute in the link between atmosphere and empathy in the architectural design process. The interview questions regarding empathy were chosen to focus the interviewees on practical aspects in their design work, making them hopefully communicate their more personal beliefs while answering; it was presumed that more abstract questions would have detached the interviewees from their more emotive subconscious. While, I would still encourage this approach, perhaps an additional questions regarding their feelings while immersed in a situation necessitating the projection of their ego would have given welcome additional input.

In addition to this, the range of the interviewees should be developed to include people of different sexes, races, and ages. The interview group could be chosen based on a larger set of architecture offices by sending out a set of questionnaires explaining that anyone interested about the study could participate. This

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<sup>58</sup> However, it should also be noted that Husserl's assistant — philosopher Edith Stein — was a woman and self-identifying phenomenologist; and the Finnish philosophers Johanna Oksala (cited in this thesis) and Sara Heinämaa — just to name a couple — are both women and openly identify themselves as working within the phenomenological tradition and methodology.



could make it possible to include architects not in leadership roles as well, bringing a welcome change in viewpoint to the study. The preliminary questionnaire answers could then be used to choose an interview group based on the people who answered it, and the resources available to the study. The research would become different following these guidelines and could be subject new issues: for example the study might lack the necessary input from office partners due to their busy schedules. Nevertheless, the new paper could function as an addition to this one, negating some of the criticisms noted in the previous section.

Personally, I would like to continue this study by attempting to interview Emanuel Christ despite his seeming apprehension. His final answer exclaiming that “it is all about architecture” has left me confused about his interview: what are the beliefs that govern his design work — and since they appear to not include a focus on atmosphere — why did he agree to answer the interview questions in the first place? The further input of a person, who criticizes the study for its Roarkian nature would surely benefit it — if the architect would nonetheless answer questions from a personal perspective, it would be interesting to see how he differentiates his personal design methodology from the one in his office.

I found that conducting the interviews was an enjoyable experience as well as an honor: I was deeply grateful to meet and discuss all of the great architects featured in this paper. The meeting with Johan Celsing — even though it posed a problem for the study due to differing from the other interviews — was particularly enjoyable, as it was my first meeting with the architect. His manner of speech, and the positive atmosphere of the discussion were a highlight for me. Reflecting on the research process now, I must stress the importance of the spoken interviews over the written ones. Although the atmosphere of the discussion

can become uncomfortable or confused if mistakes are made, the human contact that this study format offers is inspirational, and from a phenomenological standpoint, the correct perspective for the study of ephemeral subjects in architecture. I thus cannot recommend such an approach enough.

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